■ METRO/A18
Police on metrowide alert as blast rocks Court of Appeals

■ SPORTS/A19
Filipino SEA Games taekwondo champ fails dope test, to be stripped of gold medal

Do you have a story to tell about Edsa I? The Inquirer is looking for those untold stories (photos, too) that contributed, no matter how small, to the first People Power in 1986 that so stunned the world and inspired and emboldened people in states everywhere to break free. The contributions that will be selected by the editors will be used for the Inquirer's special celebration of the 20th anniversary of Edsa I. **Send your contribution, with your address and contact number, not later than Feb. 15 to** blastmasters@inquirer.com.ph

e-mail: feedback@inquirer.com.ph

PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

...y, February 1, 2006 ★★ 7 sections / Vol. 21 / No. 55 P18 website: www.inq7.net

Mobile sex clients increase no. of Pinoys with HIV/AIDS

By Christian V. Esguerra

THE MOSTLY MIDDLE CLASS CLIENTS OF SEX WORKERS might now helped pump up the number of Filipinos affected with HIV/AIDS to 11,200 last year, almost double the number three years ago.

According to a Department of Health study, "the most frequent clients of sex workers" were vegetable dealers in

MOBILE A4

Twist to love story: Ex-wife barred from seeing Faeldon

THERE'S A TWIST TO THE REPORTED LOVE story of Marine Capt. Nicanor Faeldon and Capt. Candy Pinon.

Faeldon's former wife, Tita Untalan, yesterday tried to see him in detention at the intelligence Service of the Armed Forces (Isaf) in Camp Aguinaldo. Despite her tearful pleas, she was not allowed to see him.

Faeldon and Untalan had their 30-year

TWIST A5

EYE-CATCHING: Ex-President Estrada looks dapper waving to his fans even while on his way to hospital for treatment of an infected eye. (Story on Page A2.)

AT HOME IN THE LIONS' LAIR: President Arroyo with Army Chief Lt. Gen. Hermogenes Esperon (right) inspect members of the Special Operations Command during her visit on Tuesday at Fort Magsaysay, Nueva Ecija. Ms Arroyo watched the antiterrorism capability of the Special Action Forces. Below she takes a break with her generals.

Oil, power, fare rates up

Malacañang bows to bishops: 'Yes-El'

By Christine O. Avendaño, Norman Bordadora and Michael Lim Ubac

PRESIDENT MACAPAGAL-ARROYO's administration yesterday yielded to the demand of Filipino Catholic bishops that it proceed with elections next year but said it would continue its efforts to produce a new Constitution.

"There will be elections in 2007, but we can be sure that President Arroyo will serve her full term unless the people say otherwise in a constitutionally sanctioned process," Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye said in a statement.

Bunye also said that Ms Arroyo was pursuing moves to amend the Constitution and adopt the parliamentary system.

"We shall leave no stone unturned in our endeavor to take the country to First World status in 20 years, with a new Constitution as our cornerstone," Bunye said.

Bunye also announced that starting this month, the 15-member Cluster Change Advocacy

MALACAÑANG A7

GMA TAKES 5 with Esperon and Maj. Gen. Benito Ramos (right) and Brig. Gen. Danny Lim.

SHOW OF UNITY: the six-time around for key opposition figures (Seated, from left) Horacio Morales, Oscar Orbos, Teofisto Guingona, Makati Mayor Jejomar Binay, Carol Araullo; standing, Luigi Tolosana, Luis Sison, Sen Juan Mayar JV Ejercito, Fr. Joe Dizon, Francisco Nemenzo, Randy Tidig, Wilson Fortaleza.

12-percent VAT takes effect today

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr., Abigail L. Ho and Michelle V. Rosa

EFFECTIVE TODAY, THE PRICES OF DIESEL AND gasoline will go up by 60 to 70 centavos a liter and power rates in the franchise area of Manila Electric Co. by an average of 10 centavos per kilowatt-hour because of the increase in the rate of the expanded value-added tax (VAT) from 10 percent to 12 percent.

Albay Rep. Joey Salceda, President Macapagal-Arroyo's economic adviser, described the 12-percent VAT rate as a short-term pain for long-term growth in address poverty.

"She is really a lucky woman because the surprisingly strong fourth quarter economic growth and stabilizing inflation have provided her with a benign climate to exercise the 2-percentage point option," Salceda said.

While the stock market welcomed the higher VAT rate, consumers and militant groups did not.

Despite her low approval ratings, President Arroyo yesterday approved the 2 percentage-point increase in the VAT rate three months after imposing the tax on previously exempt products and

OIL, POWER A6

President splurges on poorest

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

THE POOR APPEAR TO BE AT THE current center of attention of President Macapagal-Arroyo, who has been on a spending binge the past two weeks.

The President has been giving away billions of pesos worth of health insurance, fertilizer, seeds, noodles and rice to those mired in poverty, as well as subsidized housing to the military and uniformed benefits to the police.

Yesterday, Ms Arroyo announced the release of P500 million in government funds for the purchase of palay seeds and organic fertilizer, to be given to provinces whose crops were devastated by typhoons last year.

She made the announcement during the inauguration of a new city hall in Nueva Ecija, whose governor, Tomas Joson, is a staunch ally of her administration.

Ms Arroyo said the province would receive a big slice of the

PRESIDENT A6

Bishops told: Chalices, bells, etc. come from mining operations

By Norman Bordadora and Christian V. Esguerra

A CONGRESSWOMAN FROM A mineral-rich province reminded the country's bishops yesterday that the Church materials they used—from chalices and bells to scapulars and the ceremonial rings on their fingers—came from mining operations.

BISHOPS A6

PCGG head: 3 senators involved in Danding cases

By Alexis Papa and Philip C. Tubeza

CAMILO SABIO, CHAIR OF THE Presidential Commission on Good Government, lashed back at senators yesterday, saying the lawmakers were violating the law when they asked him about the reported compromise agreement between coconut farmers and businessman Eduardo Cojuangco on the estimated P130 billion in coco levy funds.

Sabio said Sen. Joker Arroyo "should have known" about a provision in Executive Order No. 1, which bars any PCGG official from testifying before any legislative inquiry since it was Arroyo himself who drafted the order in 1986 when he was executive secretary to then President Corazon Aquino.

Sabio also said other members of the Senate—Juan Ponce Enrile, Edgardo Angara and Senate President Franklin Drilon—were defendants in some of the ill-gotten wealth cases so that answering any questions from them would prejudice the PCGG's mandate to go after ill-gotten wealth.

At the Senate hearing on the PCGG budget the other day, Sabio sought the ire of Enrile and Arroyo

PCGG A4

Agri officials tag Bolante in fertilizer scam

By Philip C. Tubeza and TJ Burgonio

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE officials yesterday said it was the office of then Undersecretary Jocelyn "Jocjoc" Bolante that ordered the release and listed the recipients of P100 million in recovered Macoy money for the Gintong Ani (GMA) program, which was allegedly used in the 2004 election campaign of President Macapagal-Arroyo.

The fund was ordered released to 13 DA regional field units (RFUs), according to Agriculture Undersecretary Belinda Gonzales and DA Central Visayas Director Eduardo Lerdoncio Jr.

The two officials said that among the recipients of the fund were three congressmen from Cebu, the province that delivered one million votes for Ms Arroyo.

"I got instructions from Usec Bolante that this—the P100 million—will be transferred to the different regional offices," Gonzales said during the DA budget hearing at the Senate.

"It was the office of Usec Bolante that decided on the listings of the P100 million," she said, adding that Bolante "verbally" told her on the phone about the list of fund recipients.

Agriculture Secretary Domingo Panganiban also admitted that it

AGRI A4

WEATHER FORECAST

Doc orders Erap hospitalization for eye infection

Shoot-to-kill for Magdalo

By Tonette Orejas
PDI Central Luzon Desk

CLARK SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE – THE MILITARY chief in Northern Luzon has issued shoot to kill orders against the four Magdalo Group officers who escaped from Fort Bonifacio two weeks ago should they show up at any camp in his jurisdiction.

"My men are ready to kill if they are met with resistance," said Maj. Gen. Romeo Tolentino in Cagayan City where he met with President Macapagal-Arroyo on Tuesday.

Tolentino said the shoot to kill order would apply to Capt. Nathaniel Rabonza and Fifth Geomarcis Lawrence San Juan, Jonery Sarmiento and Hector Bautista Jr. should they be spotted and fight back in any military camp in Northern and Central Luzon.

"We will have to do the ultimate solution, which is to shoot to kill, because they now are vehicle against the government. They are highly trained to kill and we aren't entirely persuasive that they are not armed when they intrude into our camps," Tolentino said.

Tolentino did not say if the four had been tracked in Northern Luzon, only that military intelligence operatives were working on recapture efforts.

In Makati City yesterday, 32 other Magdalo members, including the seventh suspected Marine Capt. Nicanor Faeldon, lolled to attend their trial on coup d'etat charges.

A military official, who requested anonymity because he was not authorized to speak, said the military considers all the rebel soldiers did not bring them to court because they feared a plot was in the works to spring some of them.

The official said the custodians became wary after unidentified men claiming to be from the Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (Isafp) inspected the Makati Regional Trial Court premises on Monday.

The men were reserved the parking space that was usually given to Isafp, the source said.

Tolentino (there was an escape plan). It's better to be careful," the officer said.

Isafp chief Brig. Gen. Mario Quevedo had previously said his unit had gotten wind of a plan to "rescue" some of the marines, particularly Navy Lt. Antonio Trillanes IV, the most prominent leader of the Magdalo Group.

But the lawyer of the accused, Rod Pulido, wasn't buying the military's story.

It would have been the first public appearance of Pardon, one of the alleged mutiny leaders, who escaped from the Isafp custody on Dec. 14 after attending a hearing at the same Makati court.

"I suppose this postponement is because the military does not want the court and the public to see the condition of Pardon... I saw him yesterday and I felt him feeling depressed because I assured he had lost a lot of weight since I saw him last December," Pulido said.

"He looked like he lacked sleep, haggard and, I would go as far as to say, he looked [like he had been] beaten. But he denied it," said Pulido, of his client who has been held in solitary confinement since his recapture.

With Reena E. Pascalingcan and Tarra F. Quismorio

Keep guns silent, Misuari tells followers

By DJ Yap

DETAINED MUSLIM REBEL LEADER Nur Misuari yesterday called on his followers to keep their guns quiet in Jolo, where 10 troops are to hold joint exercises this month, as officials said.

Misuari, on trial for leading a deadly rebellion in 2001, launched the peace overtures from a hospital in Quezon City, where the 69-year-old was undergoing a medical check-up after being allowed out of jail temporarily.

Yesterday he met with government chief peace negotiator Jesus Dureza to discuss prospects for peace in southern Mindanao where Muslim separatists are fighting for an independent state.

Misuari spoke with his followers by phone to inform them that he had been allowed out of detention, and later met small groups of journalists.

Misuari is the leader of the former separatist Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which signed a peace treaty with Manila in 1996.

He later became governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) but in 2001, again led a short-lived rebellion that left more than 130 dead on Jolo and in neighboring Zamboanga City.

President Macapagal-Arroyo's government were along with Misuari in what observers said was an attempt to assure his armed followers would not attack when 120 troops hold a month of joint maneuvers with Filipino troops from Feb. 20.

"He is telling his boys in Jolo to keep the peace," Dureza told reporters as Misuari spoke to his men by mobile phone from his room at St. Luke's Hospital.

Dureza said he did not discuss with Misuari the 10-military deployment, but added he received an assurance that the Muslim leader would help in the general law and order situation there.

"He is emphatic about a possible breakthrough because as you know we have problems in Jolo that involve some of his followers there. I think he will help us. He was in touch with his people there," he said.

Dureza said he would also separately meet in Jolo soon to personally meet with Misuari's followers, many of whom have openly joined other Muslim factions such as the Al-Qaida-linked Abu Sayyaf group.

"The chairman is still a respected leader by many of his people and I think he will still play a key role in seeking to it that we have a lasting [balance]," he said. With AFP

Searching for the American Dream?

'Brokeback Mountain' gets most Oscar nominations

BEVERLY HILLS—THE COWBOY LOVE STORY "Brokeback Mountain" led the Academy Awards field Tuesday with eight nominations, among them for best picture and honors for actor Heath Ledger and director Ang Lee.

Also nominated for best picture were the "Batman Begins," the ensemble drama "Crash," the Edward R. Murrow chronicle "Good Night, and Good Luck" and the assassination thriller "Munich."

The Johnny Cash biography "Walk the Line," considered a likely best picture nominee, was shut out of the category although Joaquin Phoenix and Reese Witherspoon earned acting nominations.

There was some red with the nominations each — "Crash," "Good Night, and Good Luck" and "Memoirs of a Geisha," although "Geisha" was shut out in the key categories.

"Munich," which had fallen off many awards analysts' best picture pick after a lukewarm reception, scored well with five nominations, including director for Steven Spielberg.

"King Kong," directed by "Lord of the Rings" creator Peter Jackson, earned only technical nominations, being shut in the major categories.

George Clooney picked up three nominations – as supporting actor for his role as a smarmy CIA undercover agent in "Syriana" and best director and co-writer for "Good Night."

"Brokeback Mountain" also scored nominations for Michelle Williams as supporting actress, Jake Gyllenhaal as supporting actor and Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana for their screenplay adaptation of Annie Proulx's short story.

The acting categories were a mix of familiar faces such as past winners Judi Dench and Charlize Theron, veterans like Clooney, Witherspoon, Rachel Weisz, David Strathairn and Frederick Hoffman gaining their first academy nominations, and young performers such as Williams and Amy Adams.

Philip Seymour Hoffman, the best actor winner for his remarkable embodiment of Capote, joined Ledger in the best actor category. Hoffman had triumphed at earlier film honors, including the Golden Globes.

The best actress race presumably will shape up as a two-woman contest between Hoffman in a gender-bending role as a man about to undergo sex change surgery in "Transamerica" and Witherspoon as singer June Carter Cash's crusading companion and future wife, in "Walk the Line."

With key juries at earlier Hollywood honors, "Brokeback Mountain" heads into the March 2 awards as the best picture front-runner. AP

Republic of the Philippines
SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM

CIRCULAR NO. 23 - P

TO : ALL SSS MEMBERS AND BENEFICIARIES

SUBJECT : PRESCRIPTIVE PERIOD FOR FILING OF REQUESTS FOR READJUDICATION OF SETTLED RETIREMENT, DEATH AND DISABILITY CLAIMS AND PETITIONS ASSAILING SAID SETTLED CLAIMS

To eliminate problems in the validation of documents since the retention period of claim records is limited to ten (10) years in consonance with Article 1144 of the Civil Code of the Philippines, which states that:

"ART. 1144. The following actions must be brought within ten years from the time the right of action accrues:

xxx xxx

(3) Upon an obligation created by law;

xxx xxx"

All requests for readjudication of retirement, death and disability benefits with the Social Security System shall be filed within ten (10) years from the date of the initial settlement of the claim. Likewise, petitions with the Social Security Commission assailing said settled claims shall be filed within the same period.

This Circular shall take effect on 1 March 2006.

For your information and guidance.

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VFA exec says he's a scapegoat

By Nikko Dizon and Leila Salaverria

THE OFFICIAL WHO IS ABOUT TO LOSE his job with the proposed abolition of the Presidential Commission on the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFACom) said he was being made the "scapegoat" for the diplomatic debacle of the Subic rape case.

"For two years, I have been doing my job efficiently, quietly and efficiently until this rape case came along," Justino Perolino, the VFACom executive director, said in an interview yesterday.

"Suddenly I'm the bad boy. They're made me the scapegoat, the neutered lamb," he said.

Perolino said he has yet to receive a formal communication on the abolition of the VFACom and the proposed creation of a new body to replace it under the Department of Foreign Affairs.

He said he was "puzzled" why the VFACom had to be abolished only to be replaced by a new body which appears to have the same functions as the VFACom.

DFA spokesperson Gilberto Asuque has declined to comment on Perolino's statements.

The VFACom is the agency that monitors the implementation of the VFA, the treaty that covers the conduct of visiting United States soldiers. Her attack was known of it until it broke into the newspaper headlines when six (U) servicemen were accused of raping a 19-year-woman in Subic last November.

The US has refused to surrender custody of the four accused—two soldiers were not charged—to the Philippines citing a VFA provision which gives protection to US troops accused of crimes while taking part in joint exercises here.

Perolino, who as VFACom head has been overseeing the rape case, believes the proposal to abolish the VFACom was the result of a roadshow against Sen. Miriam Defensor Santiago.

"I think it's personal. I think this is the continuation of the talk Paredes [outings of Minority Floorman Santiago that [Foreign] Secretary [Alberto] Romulo has swallowed his conscience I do not know," he said.

Santiago earlier castigated Paredes for allegedly stalling it appears that he had the authority to speak for Cabinet members on issues concerning the VFA.

New trial run for luggage inspection scheme

By Nikko Dizon

THE MANILA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT AUTHORITY (MIAA) would again give its modified method for screening passengers' luggage another go starting today after shelving it for nearly three weeks.

Passengers departing will find checking machines either by side or the departure area of the Ninoy Aquino International Airport Terminal 1 to facilitate faster passenger flow leading to the check-in areas.

A X-ray will be placed around each pieces of luggage after they has gone through the initial X-ray, according to Miaa assistant general manager Angel Alcalde.

However, Alcalde said strapping machines are not yet available such that this might be done manually.

Alcalde said the Miaa still aims to implement the scheme, wherein passengers would not be allowed to wrap their luggage after the initial X-ray.

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"St. Luke's just keeps getting better. It has the most modern equipment you can find in other hospitals," Dang says. For her, the medical care she gets from the doctors and staff of St. Luke's is unparalleled. "And their personal touch ... no words can describe how well they treat me and my family. There's so much love and care."

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Pinoys' sympathy helps rape victim, family cope with trauma

By Tarcelo Grajao
PDN Central Luzon Desk

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—THE family of the Filipino woman allegedly raped by four American servicemen says the outpouring of support from fellow Filipinos has given them the strength to cope with the trauma stemming from the Nov. 1, 2005 incident at the Subic Bay Freeport.

In a number of letters to the woman's supporters, her mother says the family was "deeply grateful" for the sympathy and help extended to them. "We have been able to rise once more," she said.

The feminine was included copies of some of the letters, including two addressed to Youth Conductor Gov. Emmanuel Pineda and other provincial officials, and to the Association of Higher Religious Superiors in the Philippines (AMRSP). Both groups had published statements of support.

"We pray that the truth will eventually give our daughter the peace and serenity she so longs for to enable her to go on with her young life," the told South Catholic officials, who earlier called for the suspension of Philippine United International games after the US Embassy's refusal to hand over the accused soldiers to Philippine authorities.

The family said the "outreach support has left us at times helpless and mourning overnight."

"It is therefore in instances like these that we find the respite we so need in these trying times," the mother wrote.

The 22-year-old woman, said her family, who are based in Zamboanga City, looked forward to a "swift and fair" justice as they expressed "great confidence" in the Philippine judicial system.

To the AMRSP, the family said it was "very comforting and consoling to know that your associations, amid the turmoil, is behind us in our fight for the basic right to be a Filipino worthy of the respect and dignity we desire."

They told the AMRSP that to "demonstrate support and appreciation for the victim's wounds by this uncalled for scenario which is now deepened upon the Philippine judiciary."

The family also thanked the Inquirer for of the Philippines, whose lawyers continue to provide legal assistance.

AN URGENT APPEAL TO THE PRESIDENT AND OUR POLITICAL LEADERS

As Congress resumes its sessions, the Consumer and Oil Price Watch (COPW) calls on our President and Political Leaders to FIRST focus on the economy and charter changes LATER.

Why the economy must be the highest priority

We need investments. Investments create jobs.

Thus, the President and Congress must give priority to economic and financial reforms to stimulate investments, local and foreign, to generate jobs that, in turn, will uplift the quality of life of our people, especially the poor.

These reforms deal with taxation, smuggling, and loopholes at Customs and the VAT, amending laws like the EVAT and EPIRA, preserving the peso value, and enhancing the credibility of the economic and finance team.

The peso has strengthened largely because of huge OFW remittances (over $11 billion last year) and the EVAT (P80 billion is the target). This momentum must not be lost.

- **We need to amend the EVAT Law.** To peg the VAT on petroleum products and electricity at 10%, and not 12%. And remove the 70% cap on input VAT. The 30% not credited is passed on to consumers. The 30% is equivalent to a 3% profit margin which, if removed, may result in business closures.
- **We need to amend the EPIRA Law.** The National Power Corporation (NPC) needs to sell or privatize only 50% of its assets, not 70% as required by the law. Open access must begin now with the operation of the Wholesale Spot Market (WESM), and not after three years and until 50% of NPC assets are privatized.
- **Smuggling is rampant and endemic.** Smuggling is unfair competition to legitimate business. It results in losses, unemployment and loss of government revenues.

Yet, there is NO determined effort and political will to go after the "Big Fishes", who blatantly display their power and connection, and JAIL them.

After working with five Customs Commissioners – Titus Villanueva, Willie Parayno, Antonio Bernardo, George Jereos, and Bert Lina, the COPW is frustrated. Nothing has happened against smuggling.

We need to plug loopholes at Customs and the VAT implementation. The COPW believes the following will plug the loopholes:

- Use of Tax Identification Number (TIN) in ALL government transactions.
- Benchmarking sales per sub sector of industry, trading and services to minimize under-declaration of sales and over-declaration of input VAT credit.
- Use of cash sales registers with PIN number registered with BIR by all business firms with annual sales of P1.2 million or P100,000 a month.
- Compelling banks as precondition to granting loans to use only audited financial statements submitted to the BIR and waiver of confidentiality for the bank, with the BIR, to conduct random check on the ITR's authenticity.
- This should be easy to implement. The Bangko Sentral, a year ago, issued Circular 472 telling banks to require from their borrowers a BIR-stamped income tax return (ITR).

GMA's finance team needs to be transparent and establish credibility at Customs and BIR to get rid of their corrupt image over the last 50 years.

Business must pay correct taxes

This is easy, but certain issues must be addressed:

- Free port zones like Subic, Cagayan de Oro and Zamboanga must export 100% of their production. None must be sold locally.
- Companies under Special Economic Zones of PEZA must export 70% of production with not more than 30% sold locally. Separate books of accounts must be maintained for products sold locally on which all applicable duties, excise and VAT taxes must be paid. If sold locally, these products must not be dumped so as not to prejudice local manufacturers who make similar products.
- Alcohol and tobacco products imported and sold by duty-free shops inside free ports and economic zones are subject to tax. This is the Department of Finance regulation. We support it. The government Duty Free Shops must pay the corresponding excise taxes and VAT.
- **Stop smuggling of petroleum products.** The DOE reports 93 oil depots. Oil companies are required to submit prior notice of their importations, the products imported, dates of arrival and bills of lading. But the DOE has no capability to monitor these things as it pays more attention on enforcing retail standards for LPG and energy conservation. **Energy Secretary Raphael Lotilla must work in tandem with the new Customs chief.**

Finally, the COPW hopes that when the budget is balanced in 2008, we will see a lowering of the tax burden not only on business, but on all our people. Paying the sins of the past, we can thus move forward.

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SC asked to disbar Ilusorio lawyer

THE DAUGHTER [illegible] crony of the late strongman Ferdinand Marcos has asked the Supreme Court to disbar a lawyer the claimed had betrayed her father over the battle for control of millions of shares in Philippine Commercial International Bank Corp.

In a seven-page letter filed with the court, Editha L. Ilusorio—a daughter of Marcos associate Fortunato Ilusorio—said lawyer Lulu S. Lubin Jr. "does not deserve the leniency of the high court and should be barred the penalty be obviously disbarred, to disbarment ... being a disgrace to the profession."

Ilusorio had hired Lubin in 1991 to represent him in a graft case where the government was claiming Ilusorio's shares in Philippine Overseas Telecommunications Corp. (PHTC).

Ilusorio and Lubin negotiated a compromise which gave the government 35 percent of POTC and its subsidiary, Philcomsat, a major investor [illegible] satellite provider.

POTC is also the parent company of listed firm Philcomsat Holdings Corp., a mining and real estate development company.

Lubin later appeared in proceedings at the Securities and Exchange Commission representing the group of businessmen led by Manuel Bulatao who had "adverse interests" in PTIC, according to Bulatao.

It was his alleged secret who filed the disbarment complaint against Lubin, but he died before the issue could be resolved.

"The practice of law should be reserved only to those whose adherence to the principles and standards of the legal profession is beyond reproach. Respondent Lubin, by his failure or refusing to find select date of person worthy of the title attorney at law," Bulatao said in her petition, demanded h[illegible] license.

Salar; 100

PLACIDO E. SALAR Jr. of Sorsogon, Region Occidental died on Sunday at the age of 100. He remains lie at the family residence at Dian Bonico, Mendez. He is survived by his children—Jolly and Boning Sabaenes, Manuel, Mott Dejero, Nesing and Bi. Dong and Pedy Bustamante, Carmencita Lanz and Mike Abes, Rose and Flora Cynthia and Ely gie Aquino, brother Pedro, nephews, nieces, grandchildren and great grandchildren. The wake be held 24 hrs. Subscribe in the Mesaras Memorial Park.

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Under the VAT Reform Law, a key part of the government's fiscal reform program, the Department of Finance (DOF) was recommended to the President an increase in the VAT rate if any of these two conditions were met in 2005: 1) VAT collection-to-gross domestic product (GDP) ratio of more than 3.8 percent, and 2) budget deficit-to-GDP ratio of more than 1.3 percent.

With the country's GDP for 2005 hitting P5.38 trillion and VAT collections reaching P 196.42 billion, the VAT-to-GDP ratio stood at 3.9 percent. The national government's budget deficit settled at P145.3 billion, resulting in a deficit-to-GDP ratio of 2.7 percent.

Vote of confidence

Francis Chua, president of the Federation of Philippine Chinese Chambers of Commerce Inc., said the increase in the VAT rate should end all doubts about the newest's commitment to "doing what is good for the economy and the people in the long term by making a sacrifice in the near term."

"I think the fund managers would give the President a vote of confidence with the VAT rate hike," Chua said.

Time enough, share prices should higher yesterday said optimism that an increased VAT rate would solve the government's fiscal problem, dealers said.

They said gains delivered the benchmark to a two-week high, 1 day before the government raised the tax rate.

Too much

Most 200 members of the Sagong Kilusang Makabayan pointed the Bureau of Internal Revenue main office in Quezon City yesterday, according to Bayan spokesperson Renato M. Reyes Jr.

"The 2% hike is too much for people who earn too little," Reyes said. "How are families would further cope with what little is left of the purchasing power of the ordinary Filipino."

The imposition of the 10 percent expanded VAT, after a four-month, court-induced delay, last Nov. 1 and its immediate impact on prices commanded the President's popularity ratings, making her the most disliked Chief Executive in the country since that type of poll was taken.

Energy Secretary Raphael Lotilla said at a briefing that fuel prices would rise by an average of only 1.8 percent despite the 2-percentage-point increase in the VAT rate.

"This is the result of mitigating measures that we have put in place, including tariff reductions and the removal of excise taxes on certain products," he said.

The increase in the VAT rate will raise the prices of diesel by 60 centavos a liter, unleaded and premium gasoline by 78 centavos a liter, regular gasoline by 67 centavos a liter and kerosene by 55 centavos a liter.

Oil firms raise prices

Oil firms Eastern Petroleum Corp., Total, Petroleum Corp. and Flying V Oil Corp. raised pump prices by those levels at 12:01 a.m. today.

Computations by the Department of Energy showed that the VAT hike should raise diesel prices by 50 centavos a liter; unleaded gasoline by 67 centavos, regular gasoline by 63 centavos, kerosene by 46 centavos and liquefied petroleum gas by between P0.90 and P0.93 a kilogram.

From P50.47 a liter, diesel is estimated to now sell at an average of P52.28 a liter.

Prices of unleaded gasoline are estimated to go up to P57.20 from P56.50 a liter; regular gasoline to P53.06 from P52.42 a liter, kerosene to P51.76 from P50.18 a liter and liquefied petroleum gas between P490.19 and P504 from between P489.28 and P540.28 per 11-kg cylinder.

Electricity rates

Households ending up to 30 kWh a month will have to pay an additional P4.83, while those consuming 31 to 70 kWh will shell out P6.76, and those who use 71 to 100 kWh, P9.66.

Those consumers are all like-wise users who are included in the 40 percent of poorest 35 percent and 20 percent, respectively.

Those consuming 101 to 200 kWh a month will see their bills increase by P18.37; those using 201 to 300 kWh, P29.00; 301 to 400 kWh, P40.75; 401 to 500 kWh, P48.44; 501 to 600 kWh, P58.13; 601 to 700 by P67.81, and 701 to 800 kWh by P77.50.

Some economists say the VAT increase may dampen consumer spending in the first half, which could hurt economic growth. Consumption makes up 70 percent of Philippine GDP.

More infrastructure

The administration plans to allocate an additional P59.3 billion for infrastructure and basic services from revenues from the higher VAT rate.

The VAT Reform Law is expected to yield P71 billion in incremental revenues this year, and the government intends to use 20 percent of the amount, or P12.7 billion, for pump priming, according to the DOF.

The remaining 50 percent will be used to reduce the budget deficit.

Finance Secretary Margarito Teves had said that the VAT Reform Law would help the nation at government achieves its goal of urging out the budget deficit over years earlier, or by 2008, instead of the original target of 2010.

Budget Undersecretary Laura Fuentes said that of the P12.5 billion, P59.2 billion would be spent on infrastructure like roads, airports, ports and irrigation systems. The remaining P3.3 billion will be used to enhance the delivery of services like education and health.

The P12.5 billion will be on top of the P33 billion that Malacañang earlier ordered the budget department to use for infrastructure development.

Upgrade in credit rating

The DOF said incremental revenues from the VAT Reform Law would hit P90.64 billion in 2007, P105.27 billion in 2008, P116.91 billion in 2009 and P128.44 billion in 2010.

Analysts have said the higher VAT rate would improve the chances of the Philippines being upgraded by credit rating agencies this year.

But some said the anticipated gains from the expansion of the value-added tax last November and the higher rate might not be achieved fully due to chronic tax evasion, corruption and inefficiency. With reports from Amanda M. Zamora-go and Reuters

PCGG head Sabio says 3 senators involved in Danding cases

when he refused to answer questions related to a requested transport order from the Office of the Ombudsman.

As a result, the PCGG was given a P1 budget for 2006. It was asking for a budget of around P67 million.

Sereno wondered why President Macapagal-Arroyo's appointees wanted to withdraw from the Sandiganbayan when it had already won initial victories in the Supreme Court in the cases against Cojuangco.

"The preliminary findings of the Supreme Court favor the government. Why will the government be harmed by the constitutional bodies of the Sandiganbayan and the Supreme Court, why cannot you go upstream?" he said.

"It is the losing party that enters into an agreement. Not the winning party," the senator said.

The right should be with the complainant in the cases against Cojuangco was the government and not the former beneficiaries who Sabio said were willing to compromise.

Arroyo said many farmers' groups were also opposed to a compromise with Cojuangco.

"You must remember that these cases are about to be finished. There are already decisions of the Supreme Court defining the rights of the parties here and suddenly here comes a compromise agreement. Why is it like that?" he said.

Arroyo said there was something wrong with this kind of deal.

Reason for Sabio's silence

Former Solicitor General Frank Chavez may have an explanation for Sabio's silence on the deal.

Chavez said the administration were trying to forge a compromise with Cojuangco as payback for his help in quashing the impeachment complaint against Mr. Arroyo last year.

Chavez said the PCGG was eager to forge a deal on the coco levy case because Cojuangco, chair emeritus of the Nationalist People's Coalition (NPC), could help Senate President Manuel Villar Jr. in ousting Senate President Franklin Drilon and Senator Juan Ponce Enrile, another NPC member, set to testify against the President.

"If Dy repeated what he told us (before the Senate), GMA would be finished there. This is part of the compromise," Chavez said.

"Sabio has been given the dirty task of implementing this agreement," he added.

Dy was supposed to testify after opposition senator Michael Defensor had implicated Mr. Arroyo in the fertilizer fund scandal with "jueteng" money by Mr. Arroyo's ex-chief of staff Jose Miguel Arroyo last year.

Chavez said the PCGG was eager to forge a deal on the coco levy

Joker drafted EO

Sabio cited Section 4 (B) of EO 1, which said that "no member or staff of the commission shall be required to testify or produce evidence in any judicial, legislative, or administrative proceeding concerning matters within its official cognizance."

"They seem to misunderstand that I am not there questions and they were violating the law," Sabio said in a phone interview.

He said he was more keen for congress Sec. 4 (B) of the order because, "They shouldn't be asking questions about those matters because those are matters within the cognizance of the commission," the PCGG chair said.

Sabio also explained that the provisions are meant "to protect the PCGG and enable it to work in its person effectively" since several defendants or their lawyers might get elected to Congress.

"And this is what has happened. Then Executive Secretary Arturo Tanguilig said that Congress might be run by banks of people involved in ill-gotten wealth cases," Sabio said.

Sabio explained that Enrile and Angara were defendants in the cases filed by the government against Cojuangco, as Civil Case No. 0033, which alleged that the Sandiganbayan used the coco levy funds to buy a majority stake in United Coconut Planters Bank (UCPB) and shares in San Miguel Corp. (SMC) and to form holding companies under the Cocomm Investment Incentives Board (CIIB).

The government is trying to recover a 27 percent stake in SMC, which could amount to P50 billion. But Sabio said he had yet to find out the terms and conditions of the compromise, or which shares in which companies are to be turned over.

The PCGG chief also said that Drilon organized first Meridian Development Corp. (FMD) as a member of the Jurex Law Office in the 1970s-1980, which Sabio said corresponded to Drilon's initials, was one of the companies under the CIIB.

Joking?

"Answering their questions would make it difficult for us to focus on questions our camp inquiries because that is the case before the tribunal. That is the collective of the premises [in EO 1]," Sabio said.

Sabio believed that the Senate was not serious when it gave his office a budget of P1. "I think they are joking about the P1 budget," he said.

He expressed confidence that the PCGG would still get the budget it was asking for.

A militant farmers group yesterday called for the arrest of Sabio for "contempt of the Senate."

"Why did he not answer questions regarding the coconut levy compromise deal he is brokering with Eduardo 'Danding' Cojuangco? What is in confidential character? Is he settling the excesses he incur' body during the Marcos dictatorship?" the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) said in a statement.

Agri officials tag Bolante in fertilizer scam

was the 'first time' the DA was used as a conduit of agrarian reform funds to be used for fertilizer.

The Senate had been trying to find out how the P728-million fertilizer fund scam, to testify on the matter. But he managed to flee overseas, supposedly to attend Rotary International conferences.

Sen. Ramon Magsaysay Jr., who presided over the night session and tried to looking into the scam, is putting up a bounty for Bolante's immediate arrest.

The senator has allocated P20,000 to send money for the bounty, and is calling on the public to publicize by donating P1 each.

Unsigned MOAs

Gonzales said Bolante's office prepared the "unsigned" memorandum of agreement that "already indicated that amounts" to be given to each EPIC.

She said Bolante and then Agriculture Secretary Cito Lorenzo signed the notice of transfer of allocation for the money in bt. depositing first with Land Bank of the Philippines before it is released.

Sixty percent of the money was released on May 3, 2004, on a week before the elections. The rest was released two to five months later, Lorenzo said.

"The testimony of the DA officials and the documents presented indicated that it was Bolante who ordered the release of the fund in a manner disclosing that it was used for election purposes in 2004," Senate President Franklin Drilon later told reporters.

Drilon said the release of the fund was in violation of the law stating that unexpended Agrarian money would be solely intended for agrarian reform.

"Certainly, this is evidence that is appropriate for the Ombudsman to examine," he had said.

Farm inputs

The P4.66 million was part of the 0549-million Macon money allocated to the GMA hybrid rice program. Of the P544 million, P62 million remained with the Department of Agrarian Reform, for farm-to-market roads.

The Philippine Rice Research Institute had the International Rice Research Institute, as reported on Sunday) received P504 million for hybrid rice seeds, and P139 million went to the MFA for "farm inputs and implements," or fertilizer.

Lorenzo said that of the P100 million, P9 million was allotted to Cebu Representative Antonio Cuenco (Lakas), Antonio Yapha (NPC), and Simeon Rivera (Lakas) with each congressman's share amounting to P3 million.

He said the fertilizer bought with the fund was delivered in full only after the elections, but admitted that deaths "cannot be avoided" that it went to supporters of the congressmen, who in turn hacked to Bolante's candidacy.

Lorenzo said reports after the hearing that it was the municipal agricultural officers who purportedly the list of farmer-recipients of the fertilizer.

"We can't avoid that. They're the ones in charge. Of course, [they have] friends or relatives," he said in Filipino.

Lorenzo said he had "no idea" why the congressmen were chosen to receive the money. He said the list had some "lists the central office."

Admin candidate

During the hearing, Sen. Edgardo Angara asked Lorenzo, "Who did these three congressmen, Lakas and NPC, support in bid rice, of course, support during the elections?"

Lorenzo replied: "I am sorry po[r] honor, I would not have any clue. But the election results of Cebu will prove that they were supporting the administration candidate."

Lorenzo also said the P3 million was released to each district but not to be liquidated.

"That of Congressman Cuenco, which was implemented by the municipality of Argao, had not been fully liquidated up to now because there is a question by the local government unit's district engineer[ing]office," he said.

He also said the funds allocated to Yapha and Cuenco were released through the Kasuyo Foundation, an author said by Bolante.

'Completely false'

But Cuenco said that "in the first place, no funds were released" to him.

"I never got hold of any funds. If the insinuation is that I received a kickback, or a release, that is completely false," he said.

Cuenco, who represents the southern district of Cebu City said he learned that the fertilizer had been given to some of the 14 "resource barangays" in his district "after the May 2004 elections."

"I didn't even know that there was such a project," he said, adding that the DA had given out right to the barangay officials.

"It never passed through me. Even I was surprised when I learned about it. I don't even know if indeed there was such a delivery of fertilizer. My provincial captains did not say anything about it. The DA should check the recipients," he also said.

'Big insult'

Magsaysay quoted reports that Bolante, a former Rotarian, is now out and now director of Rotary International, had arrived in the country from abroad and again slipped past immigration authorities despite an arrest order issued by the Senate last December.

"The continued disappearance of Bolante has become a big insult not only to the Senate but also to our countrymen who are hungry for the truth as regards the real beneficiaries of the fertilizer funds," Magsaysay said in a statement.

"A number of his staff and the committee was hoping to raise between P200,000 and P500,000 for any information that would lead to Bolante's arrest.

The committee is resuming its inquiry tomorrow and has invited 16 officials led by Secretary Domingo, provincial officials and suppliers, among others.

It did not issue an invitation to Bolante because there is no confirmed address for his arrest.

Bolante had sent letters to the effect that he would appear at the hearings if the Senate lifted the arrest order on him—a condition that Magsaysay rejected.

On Dec. 12 last year, the Senate cited Bolante in contempt and ordered his arrest after he again failed to appear at a hearing despite several subpoenas.

'Rotary's good name'

The Rotary Club of Makati Silver has passed a resolution calling on Bolante to show up at the Senate inquiry.

"While Rotary neither condones nor acquits Director Bolante of any accusation, it is essential that he appear the processes of the government institutions, answer their questions, and explain his side," the club said, adding:

"Pending such processes with explanations that his duties as director of Rotary International system his presence abroad and would not allow him to be present [at the] inquiry simply exacerbates the situation, damaging himself and unduly impugning the good name of Rotary as well." With a report from Michael Lim Ubay

President on spending binge for poorest 4.1 million

and subsidy programs, which is set to start within the next two months, the Palace said.

Party-list representative Agnes Arroyo-Pinpin reported.

The program is aimed at addressing the immediate needs of 4.1 million Filipinos identified by the National Nutrition Council as suffering from "severe hunger," the Social Welfare department said.

It said food aid would also be given to 1.4 million Filipinos, while farmer-priced food commodities would be made available to 2.7 million others.

The DSWD report said that under the subsidy program, the government would give a kilogram (1.1 pounds) of rice each week to 1.22 million schoolchildren in the 2006-07 school year.

It said some 411,000 pupils in the poorest towns would be supplied with milk, while a "food for work" program would be offered to 70,000 families.

The government reportedly also aims to provide start-up capital to 40,000 "micro" businesses that will rice, noodles and other commodities to poor communities.

The government-run National Food Authority (NFA) is to supply the subsidized food, the report said.

Dole-outs

The government's subdivision pens Dole-outs have been a staple of the President's speeches during her visits to the provinces, military camps and depressed areas.

In Mandaue City she announced the allocation of P500 million for the purchase of basic medicine.

She promises one that she would have "five times the normal budget for the subsidized program.

In Baguio City, Ms Arroyo announced a plan to give P500 million more to the cash-strapped SSS, to counter that the pension of the retired and laid-off would be kept within its reserve track.

In Toledo City, she said she was committing P500 million for the subsidy of PhilHealth cards.

The commissioner of the health card subsidies a year after they were distributed during the 2004 campaign season was one of the perceived reasons for the plunge in Mr Arroyo's approval ratings.

Last camp Aguinaldo, the President promised P500 million for the soldiers' housing program. At Camp Crame, she promised P1 billion to boost the benefits for the police force.

During the anniversary celebration of the Liberal Party, she reiterated her appeal to Congress to pass the 2006 budget, which would give all government employees, including soldiers and police, a pay like worth P13 billion.

Clueless

According to Ms Arroyo, the funding for these subsidies will come from P56 billion-worth spending program cut for the first quarter of the year.

But her economic managers are reportedly clueless on where to get the P13-billion, and how is to be spent, given that their pump-priming normally involves spending by big-ticket items that have great impact on the economy.

Malacañang...

(from page A1)

Commission would launch a P1-million campaign to inform Filipinos about efforts to amend the Constitution.

House committee rejects No-El

In the House of Representatives, the committee on constitutional amendments, voting 19-3, adopted a motion made by Rep. Rodolfo Fariñas of Davao City to reject any amendment that would scrap next year's polls.

Golez said this would allay speculation that no election was part of a "hidden agenda."

The House committee also approved a motion by Rep. Teodoro Locsin of Makati City supporting any proposals to extend the terms of local officials and legislators.

No election repulsive

"That sends a big signal that the committee finds implicit before repulsive and abhorrent," Locsin said.

On Sunday, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines issued a pastoral statement categorically declaring opposition to any election to scrap the 2007 elections.

In effect, the CBCP supported former President Fidel V. Ramos, who had warned Mr Arroyo that unleashing next year's balloting would be a "monumental blunder."

Mr Arroyo's handpicked Consultative Commission had recommended that the 2007 polls be rolled off to pave the way for the full functioning of the parliamentary system in 2010.

The commission also had proposed that the three-year terms of the members of the House of Representatives that will run on next year's elections be halt the 2-in scenario's terms—be extended to 2010. The Senate, under this plan, would be abolished and the Senators would sit in an interim parliament.

Last nail on coffin

The 310-member CBCP said that while certain aspects of the Constitution needed revision, it did not support "hasty efforts to change this fundamental law of the land" without widespread discussion and the participation of the people.

The partisans also said the amendment would be better done by a constitutional convention.

Critics of Mr Arroyo's move to amend the Constitution have charged that the 68-year-old President wanted a graceful way out after surviving an impeachment attempt in Congress last year.

The impeachment move, killed by Mr Arroyo's supporters allies in the House, followed disclosures in wiretapped conversations purportedly between her and former Election Commissioner Virgilio Garcillano.

The opposition said the recordings showed Mr Arroyo manipulated the 2004 presidential election—a charge she has vehemently denied.

"The approval by the committee on constitutional amendments of my motion to allow, to reassure and enjoy Sec.2C [no election] should be the last nail on the coffin of the immoral and unlawful proposal to scrap the 2007 elections. Sec.2C should be considered buried," Golez said.

Everybody has relatives

"When the issue of term extension is brought up, there is deafening silence even from the opposition. It seems everybody has relatives everywhere," Locsin said before the committee voted on the proposal to scrap constitutional term and turnover extensions.

The little speech appeared to work as many of the members of the committee, some of whom had relatives who were elected to positions in the local government units, objected to his motion.

Rep. Constantino Jaraula of Cagayan de Oro City, however, said that the measures adopted yesterday would still be subject to plenary debates and the period of amendments. It tends to the administration's point man in the House Charter change initiatives.

The House committee has stepped up debates on Charter change after a caucus of the ruling Lakas-CMD last month gave full support to Mr Arroyo's initiative to amend the Constitution.

Malacañang has been flip-flopping on the no election issue.

Just before the bishops met, Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita declared that Mr Arroyo had not budged from her no election position. This was after a Council of Elders meeting suggested, according to Ermita, that some of those who spoke out against going ahead with the 2007 balloting.

No turning back

Speaker Jose de Venecia told reporters after the decision that the House was pushing the motion toward the parliamentary system.

"Absolutely there's no turning back. If we move rapidly, we move now," said de Venecia.

"We appreciate the historic decision of the bishops and the archbishops to now go for Charter change. This is a breakthrough, a welcome positive constructive criticism. That is a terrific end we salute that."

But he said the CBCP's mode of amending the Charter—through a constitutional convention (ConCon)—was "something that we could not support at this time because of the delay of two to four years and the incredible cost—we need P8 billion which we don't have."

The constituent assembly—the House and the Senate working together—can finish its work in 45 days to two months, while a constitutional convention could take two to four years, according to De Venecia.

In two ConCon delegates for 221 congressional districts, "you have 424 now politicians [since the size of Congress, as those things should be marked carefully by us] 'solons' Bishops."

De Venecia said there was no argument about the need for electoral reforms such as computerization of the polls and pushing through with the 2007 elections.

"But not in lieu of the elections in 2007. There's no moral dimension that we cannot note to extend our terms of office. That is outrageous," he said.

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Twist to love story: Ex-wife barred from seeing Faeldon

From page A1

must-hugs assailed early last year. They are children Faeldon has an 18-year-old son from a previous relationship.

"I want to tell the body: (can) not to. I just want to see him," Ursalan, in tears, told reporters. She said she and Faeldon split because "he loved the country more."

She refused to believe reports that her estranged had found a new love in Eliza, 33, who is single.

"They don't have a relationship. I just know," Ursalan insisted.

Playing up romantic angle

Faeldon himself has denied any relationship with Eliza, saying the military was playing up the romantic angle to downplay the support he was getting from his brothers in arms.

But military sources said the mutation began last year when alleged lovers in detention. The love officials were thrown in a room around seven from each other and about to start a meal.

Faeldon, smiling sheepishly with his hands cuffed, offered a piece of rice to someone seated across him. Eliza was also smiling nervously.

A man off camera asked someone to remove Faeldon's handcuffs. But Faeldon, still smiling, mumbled, "Of lang ito (It's OK to)."

Throughout the video clip, the alleged lovers avoided looking at each other.

It was the first video of the two that lady released since Faeldon was arrested with Abaa on Jan. 27. lady released the video to disprove the claim of Faeldon's lawyers that Faeldon and the two were being maltreated. (See related story on Page A2.)

Faeldon, an alleged Oakwood mutiny leader, had been a fugitive since Dec. 14 when he escaped from his military escorts outside the Makati Regional Trial Court building.

Abaa was one of the military prosecutors in the mutineers' general court-martial.

'Video propaganda'

The lady video was not dated. But reporters noted that Faeldon was wearing the same shirt he had on in a video taken of him last Saturday noon, which was aired released by the military.

While still on the run, Faeldon himself released a string of "video propaganda."

Before his capture, Faeldon released through his website, www.philpinas.org.ph, three videos of himself inside military and police camps around the country.

Even after his arrest, two more videos of Faeldon were released showing him in the AFP General Command headquarters in Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City and inside the military headquarters in Camp Aguinaldo in Makati.

Abaa, a lawyer, has so far not asked to see a lawyer or any of her family from her native Masbate, Cagayan.

Turned away

Faeldon and Faeldon's brother Cesar were turned away at Aguinaldo yesterday. Cesar Faeldon said he was allowed to see his brother on Sunday as he was surprised that he was refused entry yesterday.

Lady chief Brig. Gen. Maria Quevedo said immediate family members could visit Faeldon's ordinance with Inquirer last before entering.

Quevedo told reporters only immediate family members were allowed to visit detainees at the lady.

Bishops told: Chalices, bells, etc. . . .

From page A1

Enrique del Maria Rep. Robert Ace Barbers made the statement following the call of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines for the repeal of the Mining Act and the scrapping of concessions on the grounds that mining operations threatened the environment.

Dinner at Palace

Apparently concerned over the strong CBCP statement, President Macapagal-Arroyo quickly invited some of the bishops to dinner in Malacañang on Monday night to discuss the issue, some bishops said.

"GMA wanted a dialogue," Ugo Archbishop Ramon Arguelles said. "It was intended to explain the side of Malacañang on mining."

About 30 Catholic were invited. Only 12 reportedly attended the dinner, according to a CBCP source.

Barbers, in a statement, said Filipinos deprived of each day of their lives on the mining industry.

"We cannot do away without it, not even the Church," he said.

The congressman pointed out that mining was the "ultimate source" of raw materials needed to build churches and manufacture those swords and religious statues.

"Developing our mineral resources would be a great opportunity for Mindanao to increase its contribution to the national coffers," said Barbers, whose province boasts of copper, gold, nickel, silver and chromite deposits.

Referring to the CBCP's statement about "environmental tragedies" resulting from mining activities, Barbers said: "We should not be afraid of our past experiences."

"It is time to correct our mistakes and stop being prisoners of our history," he added.

Barbers said the government's policy was unchanged on the premise that mining would bring economic growth and ease poverty based on the principle of sustainable development.

A good sign

"Mining is certainly not 'destructive' and evil. You can do it if it's made purposeful, if it initiate poverty and improve the lives of our people?" he said.

Bgd. Bishop Antonio Ledesma, CBCP vice president, said Malacañang's decision to talk with the bishops was "a good sign."

"It means that it is ready to dialogue with the bishops about (mining)," Ledesma told reporters.

Arguelles said he was invited but could not make it because he had to return to Batanes. He said the invitation was made by "word of mouth."

He said other prelates also failed to go because of previous engagements.

Rapu-Rapu incident

Sta. Church official said Ms. Arroyo invited primarily the 21 bishops of Mindanao and a few from the Visayas familiar with mining activities in their dioceses.

It was this group which reportedly pushed for the pastoral statement on mining.

Ledesma said the bishops were also "interested" in the Malacañang dialogue if only to bring up the problems of their flocks over mining operations.

The priests cited the mining accident on Rapu-Rapu Island, where effluents containing cyanide were released into your from coal-mining there into adjacent bodies of water, causing fish kills in the coastal community.

Second meeting

The Monday dinner was believed to be the second Ms Arroyo has had in Malacañang with bishops in about six months.

During a plenary gathering of bishops in July 2005—at the height of the "Hello Garci" wiretap scandal—at least three bishops were invited to dinner by Ugo Drug Ed Cardinal Gregorio Ni Manila for a dinner at the Palace, the bishops had learned.

The meeting was later confirmed by then CBCP president Archbishop Fernando Capalla, who said, however, that he wasn't there.

No intervention

At least one Church official also told the bishops at the time that the dinner meeting was on the mounting calls for Ms Arroyo's resignation.

House Deputy Majority Leader Jeroma Guilles, in a statement yesterday said the Church could give moral guidance to political leaders but not dictate to them how to govern.

"The Church can . . . help us on the ground as how to confront poverty, if we eliminate poverty people will have more time to attend to Church services and do their religious obligations," he said. *With reports from Michael Lim Ubac and TJ Burgonio*

Mobile sex clients increase . . .

From page A1

Ugo City, bus driver in Pasay City, tricycle driver in Angeles City and construction worker in Cotabato City.

Indeed, the face of HIV/AIDS in the country is changing and it's doesn't look pretty.

The number of infected Filipinos jumped to 11,249 last year from only 6,000 in 2002, according to the results of the "worldwide" method made available by the United Nations Program for HIV/AIDS and the World Health Organization.

This approach is used in countries like the Philippines with low-level epidemics, meaning the HIV prevalence here is less than 5 percent of the population.

Also alarming

Another alarming finding was that two cases involving injecting drug users (IDUs) had been discovered in Cebu by the Integrated HIV Behavioral and Serologic Surveillance (IHBSS) conducted by the Department of Health.

Officials who attended the National Documentation forum on HIV and AIDS in Pasay City yesterday agreed that the figures did not completely reflect the extent of the problem. "Bad's because many persons with AIDS remain in hiding for fear of their existence.

Health Secretary Francisco Duque III said that of the 11,200 known persons with AIDS/HIV, 8,000 were in the general population.

"All signs are pointing that our window of opportunity may be fast closing and that soon, we may be facing the dreaded epidemic—an explosive explosion that can take shape in just a few years or decades," he warned in a speech. "No one can predict if and when an epidemic will strike."

Duque blamed the unabated sexually transmitted infections (STI), low condom use, unsafe work environment, ignorance of the risks among the youth, and the growing anonymity of IDUs.

High prevalence of hepa-C

In Cebu, which registered the first IDU infections since 1996, the IHBSS found out that 41 percent of drug users interviewed and tested had hepatitis C.

"The very high prevalence of hepatitis-C indicates that there is widespread needle- and syringe-sharing in the population, a behavior that also facilitates HIV transmission," according to the report which had covered 243 samples.

Overall, the study involved 12,500 respondents from 1,000 households in seven cities, one having sex with men, once who consulted STI clinics, male customers of sex workers and IDUs.

The feared epidemic triggered by needle-sharing can be illustrated by the current situation in Cebu.

According to the IHBSS, 62 percent of IDUs there had sex in the past 12 months prior to the study.

Fifty-two percent of them had a regular or casual sex partner, 39 percent of whom were needle users.

Four-ten percent of IDUs who had sex in the past year were customers of sex workers.

Defined by occupation

The IHBSS included 3,310 occupational cohorts of men, meaning "men defined by their occupation who were known to be frequent clients of sex workers."

The highest prevalence of clients were found among vegetable dealers in Baguio (72 percent), bus drivers in Pasay (52 percent), tricycle drivers in Angeles City (37 percent) and construction workers in Davao (35 percent).

There is one bright spot in all this. In 1993, a study using the Epimodel (a computer program used to estimate and project AIDS cases) said there were roughly 58,000 Filipinos with HIV/AIDS. It projected that the number would shoot up to 93,000 by 2000.

Complacent

The latest finding showed only a 0.81 percent case rate. However, Duque pointed out that that translated to 11,200 people aged between 15 and 49.

"We can't afford to be complacent. The fight against AIDS continues," said Jan Lindberg, UNAIDS Philippines liaison director.

RP still 2nd to Iraq as most dangerous for journalists

Bill sought for P10B for martial law victims

by Alcuin Papa

THE PRESIDENTIAL Commission on Good Government yesterday urged Congress to approve a bill that would make legal the allowance of P10 billion from the second Marcos-II government to the compensation of victims of rights abuse during the Marcos regime.

"The bill is now in their (Congress) hands, they should pass the bill for the enactment of the law," said PCGG Commissioner Ricardo Abcede.

Abcede also said the PCGG was not in a position to correct how the fifteen-point compromise agreement on the agency's role therein was interpreted by the Department of Agriculture for the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program.

He said all the uncovered assets of the Marcoses amounted to some $658 million.

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The WORLD

Lisa Lorenzo B. Queco

Hamas warned: Change or lose aid

LONDON—WORLD POWERS TRYING TO BROKER Middle East peace said Islamic militant group Hamas must reject violence and recognize the state of Israel or risk losing vital aid when it forms a new Palestinian government.

But the so-called Quartet, made up of Russia, the European Union, the United States and the United Nations, stopped after a meeting in London that International finances would continue to aid the moderate government of President Mahmoud Abbas, at least until a new government was formed.

The goal was to give Hamas, which won a shock victory in Palestinian parliamentary elections last week, some breathing space to change its policies before forming a new government, possibly within three months, said US and EU officials.

"The Quartet concluded that it was inevitable that Hamas ministers in any new government would be reviewed by donors against that government's commitment to the principles of nonviolence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations," said a statement by the Quartet.

Hamas immediately rejected the conditions listed by the Quartet and said it was up to Israel to change.

"The Quartet should have demanded an end to Israeli occupations and aggression, not demanded that the victim should recognize the occupation and stand bewildered in the face of the aggression," Hamas spokesperson Sami Abu Zuhri said.

European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana told reporters afterward it could take up to three months before a new Palestinian government was formed and vital EU funding would continue at least until then.

"If these conditions are met then we stand ready to continue [to fund the Palestinian Authority]," said Solana. "If they do not change then it will be very difficult," he added.

Last year, the EU gave the Palestinian Authority 500 million euros ($615 million).

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who had been pushing for a strong statement against Hamas from the Quartet, reiterated that the militant group must adhere.

"There are responsibilities which come with governing," she said at the news conference, adding that the Palestinians deserved a better life.

The Palestinian Authority faces a huge budget crunch and the Quartet made more than mindful of the needs of the Palestinian people, it would continue to support Abbas' caretaker government.

"It's important to note that we do believe that also Hamas understands it is supposed," said Rice, referring to Abbas' comments.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said if Hamas changed it could lead to engagement with the international community.

"If Hamas... transforms itself from an armed movement into a political party respecting the rules of the game... I think the investments and economically should be able to work with them."

Both Hamas and Abbas, whose Fatah party lost at the polls against Hamas in last week's parliamentary elections, appealed earlier to foreign donors to fill vacuum in our cried aid. Reuters

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Danish editor apologizes for 'offensive' cartoons

COPENHAGEN—THE EDITOR of a Danish newspaper which printed cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed apologized Monday as angry protests continued across the Muslim world, threatening trade and security repercussions for Muslim countries.

"These cartoons were not in violation of Danish law but have touched (offended many) Muslims, and for that we apologize," wrote Jyllands-Posten daily editor in chief Carsten Juste in a letter to the Muslim envoys in Jordan.

Published last September, the 12 cartoons included portrayals of the Prophet wearing a time-bomb shaped turban and showed him as a lewd-wedding turned flanked by shrouded women.

Initially passing with little comment, they were later reprinted in a Norwegian magazine, prompting an indignant backlash and calls for an apology in the leading Muslim.

Muslims regard images of the prophet as blasphemous. AFP

YEAR OF THE DOG
A YOUNG girl looks at a mobile of two which are supposed to bring good fortune. AFP

Al-Qaida's Zawahri survives US air strike

DUBAI—AL-QAEDA DEPUTY leader Ayman al-Zawahri survived US Presidential George W. Bush in a "hunt for" in a video tape aired on Monday, saying a recent US air strike targeting him had killed only innocent people.

In the tape aired by Al Jazeera television on Monday, Zawahri, Osama bin Laden's right-hand man, also mentioned in tape which the al-Qaida leader had offered the United States in an audiotape aired earlier this month.

"A US warplane have launched a raid... on a village near Pakistan... just after the Eid al-Adha (feast) in which 18 Muslim men, women and children were killed in their (US) fight against jihad (which they call terrorism)," he said, referring to the January 13 strike in Pakistan. "They said that was intended to kill myself and four of my brothers but now the whole world has discovered the US lies and their failure and brutality."

"I will never mystify (death) as set by God the Almighty but I say (him-)(it) not come just (US President George W.) Bush or all the powers on earth... cannot bring it can vouch for (him-)(it)," Zawahri said in the tape, by saying "no" first campaign "to the butcher Bush... you are not only a defeated liar, you are, with aid from God, wound, a failure and a bad omen for your nation. You have brought disaster to your country and (all) facing more." Broadcasting, more of Zawahri's speech, Aaron's lairs said he invited Bush to become a Muslim. "Should you accept, you become a brother and God forgives you all that is past." Resuming to the new tape, Adam Yahya apologizes to Iran from Muslim said: "But al-Qaida leadership is clearly on the run and under a lot of pressure." Al-Qaida remains a lethal and determined enemy," he said.

"We continue to take the threat from al-Qaida seriously, and continue to work with our partners around the world to do so," The US State Department and officials were analyzing the tape for its authenticity for downplayed its significance as a confidence to battle al-Qaida after the Sept. 11 attacks on New York and Washington. Reuters

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WORLD BRIEFS

US hostage Carroll in video appeal

Carroll, kidnapped in Jolo in June 2001, appeared in the video, which was shown on Philippine television on Monday. It was not possible to date the video, but Carroll, who was pictured wearing a white headscarf, looked thinner and pale.

Trial of ex-Enron CEOs begins

Canadian serial killer pleads innocence

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February 1-28, 2006

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

OPINION

Vol 21 No. 35

Collision course

EDITORIAL

THIS TIME, THE PASTORAL LETTER OF THE Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines left no room for ambiguity. After seeing their July 2005 statement misunderstood, in a sense, hijacked by the administration, the Catholic bishops left no room for misinterpretation in their latest statement. Central to their statement is the search for the truth. They said the search for truth should be pursued "relentlessly," after pausing out in no uncertain terms how unconstitutary, in a moral sense, the official search was. And they emphasized that there is such a thing as the truth.

In the past, cynical people used the example of Medieval theologians debating how many angels could dance on the head of a pin to point out how ridiculous religious debates could get. A similar exercise has been engaged in by administration apologists in Malacañang, Congress and the media who proudly asked, "What is the truth?"

The search for the truth seeks to determine one central question: Did President Macapagal-Arroyo cheat during the 2004 elections? The bishops said an objective search for the answer to that question should continue. But they also pointed out that the search has been hampered by both the administration (with its "acts of evasion and obstruction of the truth," as well as "unconstitutional policies") and the opposition (which has used the search for the truth "as a means of furthering their political ambitions").

"Tragically, many Filipinos have lost trust in political leaders from left, right and center, and, worse still, in the political institutions themselves which are perceived by many to be corrupted," the bishops noted. To restore confidence in political institutions, they enumerated a short list of concrete prompts and tasks, the first of these being to reinstall the people that they must remain bound by the Constitution. Therefore, the public must resist the seduction of military subversionism and their messianic civilian partners. There is no moral basis for a military coup.

Next, the bishops pointed out the need to employ existing institutions and legal processes in searching for an answer to the question of the President's culpability. They then denounced, in no uncertain terms, the proposal to cancel elections next year (which has already resulted in the Palace backpedaling on the idea), and they questioned the motives for Charter change. It's a constitutional convention or bust, they said. Then they went on to support the call for electoral reform, and supported that calls for the current Comelec to resign are not unfounded either.

The bishops' call for a more objective search for the truth provides an impetus for the revival of proposals to establish a fact-finding Commission, or the appointment of an independent counsel following the Americus model, to make an investigation of the facts. Such an exercise, of course, will only be possible if the President supports it and does not raise a postponement and window-dressing effort like the Consultative Commission for Charter Change, the Council of Elders, or retired Chief Justice Hilario Davide's appointment as electoral reform czar. Then again, administration support for such an undertaking might result in its worst nightmare: an impeachment effort with the benefit of hard facts instead of poorly-drafted speeches.

The late Justice Cecilia Muñoz Palma always believed that no one is beyond redemption, a Catholic view certainly shared by the bishops. This may be why they still leave room for the President to prove her critics wrong and plunge into a serious, sustained effort to get to the bottom of allegations concerning the 2004 elections and beyond. However, if neither the President nor her party is interested in such an effort, then they are headed for a head-on collision with the bishops on the question of Charter change.

Perhaps realizing the possibility, even inevitability, of such a confrontation, the bishops closed their statement with an ambitious program to rejuvenate the crumpled political muscles of the Catholic Church. The clergy and spiritual ignored their plan in July for all citizens to come together and study the issues. Now the bishops felt it necessary to reiterate that call.

Former Miss Universe talks about housing

IT WAS "BEAUTY AND THE BEASTS" AT THE Philippine ex-Manila last Monday. The guests were one-of-a-kind and I cannot forsaken names, for two: Miss Universe Margie Moran, and two politicians (nothing to Kimberly about).

Moran explained the project of Habitat, an NGO providing homes for the homeless. She was assisted by Raul Bernardo, a member of Habitat's board of trustees.

The publication (yes, beside Marsden K. of Correctness and Councilor Gaite Fortune of Manilans City, tried to mention the millennium-name-mentality as it turned out) about the matter of dumping on Constitution and critism of government.

Habitat is not a government agency. It is a private organization that uses private money to build houses for those who have none. And unlike the government, it does not pamper or spoil the squatters with handouts. It proceeds on the principle of self-help. It convinces squatters, row houses or three-story apartment buildings. But the beneficiaries have to help build them. Then, they own not only the shelter they build their homes on (if they own land).

They are first taught carpentry, masonry, plastering, painting, electrical installation, etc., before being let loose on the construction. After the work is finished, they not only have their own homes by themselves, they also have learned new skills. Afterwards, they have to help build homes for other beneficiaries.

The homes are made of strong materials—concrete and wood—prefabricated and shipped and assembled on the site. The living amenities are much and include a loft for extra space. The units come in various sizes (the beneficiaries can choose what they want), but they also sort out for different sizes, from only P250 a month for the single-story one house to a maximum P1,200 for the biggest units on the upper floors of the apartments. The rates are not sold, and so their cannot be sold to third parties.

This is a big improvement on the government practice of selling housing units at giveaway prices to squatter beneficiaries. The squatters sell the rights to the units and then go back to squatting, want to the relocated again and repeat the same procedure. This does not solve the squatting problem (demolition messages are of no use since it proves that crime pays; there is plenty of money) in squatting. The government spends billions of pesos for housing units intended for squatter families but the units end up in the hands of real-estate speculators who buy off the beneficiaries who go back to squatting. If this practice isn't stopped, the government will run out of money and land but the squatting problem will be bigger than ever. Such a policy only encourages more squatting.

Where does Habitat's capital come from? From donations (they're tax deductible). The international Habitat organization provides a 50 percent counterpart fund for every peso that the Philippine Habitat raises. Thus, it is important for the beneficiaries to join the fund-building so that Habitat can continue building more houses for unfortunates like them.

Moran reported happily that Habitat has a payback rate from beneficiaries of 65 to 100 percent. Compare that to the payback rates at government housing projects where percentages range from 10 to 100 percent. In fact, some government beneficiaries move into the units without any intention of paying at all. These are the ones who sell the rights to their units and then go back to squatting. They find this practice very profitable, and this practice seems to encourage more squatting as opposed to stopping.

How does Habitat choose the beneficiaries? Local organizations choose those who have a

As I See It

Amad H. Cruz

means of livelihood, to make sure they can pay the rent. Those who have none are taught skills for different occupations according to their vocations. Habitat has a separate department for this.

Habitat has partnerships with religious and social organizations that organize the women into home groups to teach them more homemaking skills. They teach the families social manners and morals. Thus, you won't find in Habitat communities men walking around half-naked or one them re-climbing upside or gambling. These non-workings, inside and out, are absolutely forbidden. And guards, each one a product of with Tom Sawyer's talents, climbed by the company.

Compare these to the squatter dumpheaps and jerry-made tenements of government housing projects or worse, to the filth, violence and disease-ridden squatter communities that local government units allow to grow in their midst today.

Why am I writing all these? Because the private sector can learn a lot from Habitat to adopt its housing policy which right now is like pouring the people's money into a bottomless pit. The government can spend quadrillions of money on squatter housing but it would never be able to solve the problem. On the contrary, it would be worse because the present policy only encourages more squatting.

For one, the Urban Development and Housing Act, better known as the Lina Law, should either be repealed or amended. This, as neither the Jose Out Antonio-Lina squatting laws make provisions for housing for informal settlers.

In the current place, the Lina Law is not being implemented strictly anyway. Only the provision favoring squatters are enforced. The law punishes professional squatters and squatting syndicates, but barter you hand of a squatting syndicate that has been prosecuted in court? We, behind every squatter community is a squatting syndicate.

(More later.)

Being Filipino

There's the Rub

Conrado de Quiros

MAHAL KINGDOMS DID SOME POSITIVE revelations the other day. Pride in being Filipino is very high and impressive to some. Pride inside and especially are denied but subconscious." She pointed figures feel was showing a star of 9 Filipinos looked toward the New Year with hope rather than with fear. Most Filipinos take still preferred democracy. "Even though it hasn't been working sufficiently."

Well, only the first one is really startling. The preference for democracy is borne out by figures that continue to show most Filipinos believe GMA elected in the election and would have her out. It is decisive as well by the lack of enthusiasm for Charter change, most people figuring it is not the solution to the problem. Most people still believe in democracy; they just don't believe it will solve their troubles with a serpent who will never go.

That most Filipinos look at the future with hope rather than dread may be explained by several things. Not completely facetiously, the Chinese calendar proclaims this year the Year of the Fire Dog. Kung Hei Fat Choy, everyone!—the year of the Fire Dog, which is given to vibrant, pious and prosperity. I've always joked that that probably means GMA will be great man, which is the one thing that nobody in all these things. Some people are not laughing.

But more tragedy, the Filipino optimism may be explained by a couple of things. One, this is a modestly Catholic country that doesn't believe in miracles. It believes in faith, but that is another story altogether. It has a good and bad side, the good being that the Filipino is considerate, believing in the duty to the efficacy of prayer, and the bad being that he expects God to work for him, believing in the duty to the efficacy of prayer to grow crops when irrigation might really do the trick. And two, the money was done late last year. The last quarter of the year being officially Christmas season in this country, it is not supposed to be bad. It is not. It is supposed to be good. It is not here. Still-unspent you still don't do some more of Filipinos have more about their chances of making some money in farming or lots or that time of year.

It's the finding that most Filipinos being proud to be Filipino that perplexes me. It seems to fly in the face of evidence. Assuming the Social Weather Stations got it right, or 9 out 10 Filipinos reportedly considered it as those terms, it seems to me to raise only more problems than it seems to solve. Child of Filipino? But we are really proud of? What does "being Filipino" really mean to us?

I do know that Filipino OFWs can be horrendously homesick and feel outside—or homeless—abroad, and for the greatest part regarding as fates fortified by exposure. Literally and literally sentenced in Hk, please. I do know that Filipinos get homesick nostalgic about Christmas and fiestas, and hang Pre Filipino paintings depicting rustic scenery on their walls alongside the icons of the Virgin Mary and the Sacred Heart of Jesus with the words "God bless our home" in them. I do know that Filipinos thrill to the victories of Manny Pacquiao and would like nothing better than to make him president, unlike he bodied disqualified 2004 but Friday GMA looking more like a poor imitation of Jim King. I do know that Filipinos like Mad singing Hoobert's "Mary Song Piney" and now like singing Dengue and Lemuel "Pinoy Ako," even though the latter leaves under a cloud of plagiarism, a heinous penalty in sin, if unwilling consecutively on being Pinoy.

Beyond this, however, I don't know what "pride in being Filipino" really means. Last July, I attended an event at Pinoy Ko Sa Mundo sponsored by the Local Australia commencing centenary of my friend Billy Espino rules to build their nation of Southland, to make sure they can pay the rent. Those who have none are taught skills for different occupations according to their vocations. Habitat has a separate department for this.

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(More later.)

It was a Bacon Supper held in memory of the 14th Australia head, Robert Burns, who was an equally romantic poems and lived an even more enviable romantic life. The supper is meant to produce tasty and sensible speeches and haunts. I wandered while I was there only to find that I was indeed celebrating the Burns Day. On Filipino hard, from only 29 years after Burns—1760 to Burns' 1789. But then I soon cleared how many Filipinos now even know Burns, again. My guess is that at least half "Tweenie in Leaves" as required reading in Filipino. That was part of "Tweenie Literature" Day, the other half of "Bataclis." I wondered how many Filipinos can still recite the immortal lines: "O pagdig na mahalagang pista.... Pag dum ay natod sa puso ng mamamayan. Mahamakin ang lahat ng mayaman kong pag-ibig."

While at this, I remembered again the studies made by several scholars in the 1990s on the attitudes of public elementary school kids to their world. Most of them tested to their preferred nationality American, Japanese and South African. Filipinos rarely came fourth. The last were of course, owed to the OFW phenomenon which has already begun to topple their homes and lives affecting the right employees. Most of these preferred American heroes to local ones, some choosing the likes of Superman or Batman as the cheery two. Most of them preferred the heroes of Hollywood DC comics to those of local ones.

To this day the Filipino Dream continues to be the Filipino Tragedy, which is to own a piece of land or become an American citizen. Credits in government and many roads that lead to Roxas, Ayala and San Francisco and ovens, unlike their many counterparts who made their way only under their own steam (metaphorically speaking, of course—Horatio Alger). Thus, being American, being Iranian or indeed being Iranian. Knowing your heroes and your goals. Finding it necessary only to be of use than. Thus, American or Iranian (or Iraqi), being who he pan, dreams about the land of your birth.

Which is the point of 5 Filipinos are proud to be Filipinos. But, but what exactly does being Filipino mean?

The predicament of Davide and Abueva

FORMER CHIEF JUSTICE ROMULO DAVIDE JR. and Dr. Jose Abueva have come under tendentious criticism for accepting assignments from President Macapagal-Arroyo to aid government.

Davide has accepted his appointment as presidential adviser on electoral reforms. Announced on the Jan. 24 Cesar Sunio forum meeting, the appointment was the only concrete decision made by the council while it remains unclear whether there was a "consensus" about going ahead with the 2007 elections.

Abueva has come under fire basically for accepting the chairmanship of the Consultative Commission on constitutional change, whose draft of a new constitution has become highly controversial. One critic, a former colleague of Abueva's at the University of the Philippines, considers that Abueva's intentions in accepting the appointment "are no doubt pure," but the compliment was accompanied by the sweeping conclusion that both Davide and Abueva "opted to lend their names and reputations to a politician who has done the greatest damage to the nation's institutions and to the democratic potential of the (so-called) constitution."

The implication is that both distinguished individuals, with impeccable record of unselfish public service, allowed themselves to be used. Some critics find it hard to imagine how so distinguished academic cannot such as that of Abueva, would feel "as a project to merit final presidency."

It is also hard to imagine how academics can make judgment calls that clearly lack academic detachment. It might also be asked if some academics who gave intellectual legitimacy to the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos had similar motivations when, probably because they were seduced by his pro-poor rhetoric, would admit that they allowed themselves to be used "as a cover" for his cronies.

And although they withdrew support from Estrada when he ran into serious political problems, it may be asked whether their association with Estrada had led to the ignominious end of

ANALYSIS

Armando Doronila

their distinguished academic careers. Apparently not, because they have now mounted the high horse in justification on political morality.

To be sure, Abueva and Davide are on a professional. The predicament stems from the fact that the presidents of their appointments is political, and in the light of this circumstance, the cynics have come to realize that the products of their labor could not be anything else but political. The implications of this conclusion is that the aims of the appointing powers are vested on them or, to put it another way, there is some kind of prejudgment of guilt by association hanging about their heads as they go to perform their tasks.

Davide and Abueva need not to apologize. Davide said he accepted the appointment because he believed he could help carry out electoral reforms to achieve an "honest and credible election process." He said: "I do not think it's politics-related at the concept of those who asked me that before. Politics, for me, is running for political positions." He added that he was just running for an elected office.

Davide last proved he can run an honest election, when he was chair of the Commission on Elections. He was appointed when the latter was incorruptible. It makes a clean sweep. It makes sense to call for the mass resignation of all the members of the commission, including Chief Benjamin Abalos. Abalos and his colleagues are resisting the declared, relying on their status as constitutional officials.

Mr. Arroyo does just have the political capital to put pressure on them to resign. But it is an extraordinary precondition to holding credible elections in 2007 which will lay the ground for the shift to a parliamentary system.

The first impression of the Arroyo government is that it can be trusted to a flawed and corrupted political process. Unless there is a complete overhaul of the Comelec and a credible process is established, let's forget all talk of constitutional reform. With an executive powers, Davide looks like the last one hired with a straightface.

Mr. Arroyo's objective is and devotion to constitutional reform are beyond question. That has been the passion of his scholarship since 1971 when he was secretary general of the Constitutional Convention. His task and that of Davide are associated with projects that, on their own merit, should be carried out in the interest of political stability, because of his history. A cleanup of the Comelec and the shift to parliamentary system open options for wider political participation and even coming about Mr. Arroyo's status by 2007.

The dilemma of both men is that their detractors are being seen to politicize statements on the issues that they have appropriately expressed. If they had declined, that would have been interpreted as not an expression of legitimacy. Indeed, their acceptances has already been interpreted as implied recognition. Whatever they decided, they were damned, appointments such as theirs are seen as legitimizing tests and the standards for which have been subjectively laid down by quarters who have appointed themselves as the interpreter of the norms and schemes of political morality.

The projects assigned to Abueva and Davide are extremely objective. Their problem is that the appointments themselves have a cloud of legitimacy. If they wait for a squeaky-clean administration to make the call, that will never happen. There's reason to believe they accepted their appointments because they expected there to a call in public duty, and they responded in that spirit and in the belief there's a job to be done. Patriots rarely they cannot choose their employers.

Inertia

AT LARGE

Rina Jimenez-David

A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE, OR SELF-INTEREST? Commission on Elections Chair Benjamin Abalos has refused to quit his post even as calls for his resignation keep on surging, insisting that the only way they can be removed from office would be through impeachment.

Calls for Abalos' resignation have been raised by the Senate following an adverse report of the Senate blue ribbon committee, and by the Black and White Movement, an alliance of civil society groups, which has also launched a online petition that has garnered over 10,000 signatures. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines weighed in with a public pledge for the commissioners to "consider" resigning, saying the poll body needed to be reconstituted into a "competent and reliable body before the 2007 elections."

Two years ago, the Supreme Court nullified in the contract between the Comelec and Mega Pacific, a consortium that supplied elections and automated counting machines, and ordered the Office of the Ombudsman to conduct further investigations and file the appropriate charges against the guilty parties, including the Comelec officials. But so far, the Ombudsman has failed to act on the case, prompting calls for its abolition, partly because of pressure from Malacañang. Meanwhile, Abalos has the temerity to criticize the Supreme Court, saying the tribunal reached its conclusions in a seemingly unethical manner, and that it is strongly worded decision has "undermined government, "without an concrete finding to back them.

In other words, the Supreme Court didn't do its job right, and the results of over 15 billions of the people's money that was spent on the project, deemed by no less than some, should be refunded aside, with the Comelec commissioners walking off into retirement.

* * *

MEANTIME, there are elections coming around the corner; 17 months from now, to be exact.

The President has said she is in favor of holding elections next year, especially in the wake of the failure of her hand-picked consultative committee on Charter change. But even if she doesn't lift a finger to derail the polls, the way things are going—at not moving—it's almost a certainty that the elections won't push through as scheduled and onward say that the outcome would not possibly be credible or acceptable.

A comparison many to Abalos' reaction to the Senate proceedings of a hearing on the botched hearing on automated elections. The IT experts consulted testified that they are "not that optimistic" about the possibility of tamper-proofing the voting, counting and tallying of votes, if only because of the technologies that have emerged since then.

A Canadian supported by Ben Lagman, adviser of the Information Technology Foundation of the Philippines (The NEED that "find the easy ways to tamper with the Supreme Court" seems to cut it pretty close, with the implication counting counterwise left with only 11 months to "procure and implement the system and to educate the voters."

Which makes us wonder if the claim of loyalty shouted by both the Comelec and Malacañang with regard to the 2007 polls is not a de facto "No-El" scenario.

* * *

THERE'S a new battlefield in the Muslim world and that's the consumer market.

In reaction to a series of Danish newspaper

Metro Manila's dragon

I WAS DRIVING ALONG NILOSS STREET IN SAN JUAN AT around 9 in the morning on Sunday, when I spotted the bright red dragon, at least 5 meters long, dancing with two lions.

Initially, it was a Lunar new year celebration, with about a dozen men doing a dragon and lion dance. I'd been asking around about the schedules of dragon dances in the Chinese and Binondo area, but it looked like the dragon decided to perform over in San Juan.

PINOY KASI

Michael L. Tan

And why not? San Juan has turned into another Chinatown. The dragon dance that morning also was sponsored by Chinese businessmen from Wack Wack Golf and Country Club, the exclusive enclave in Mandaluyong City that is home to many of the country's richest Chinese.

The dragon dance was part of the festivities that marked the opening of Eng Bee Tin Chinese Deli, a branch of the famous Binondo-based Chinese delicacies store, in the Greenhills Shopping Center. Eng Bee Tin is known for its hopia, a pastry filled with sweet bean paste, and other Chinese delicacies.

Eng Bee Tin's Greenhills branch is the latest in a series of new Chinese restaurants, bakeshops and other businesses that have opened in San Juan in the past few years. Many of the owners are Chinese-Filipinos who have moved to San Juan from Binondo, Quiapo and Sta. Cruz.

Why San Juan? Many of the Chinese-Filipinos who have moved to San Juan are relatively well-off, and they are looking for a more upscale environment than Binondo, Quiapo and Sta. Cruz, which have become congested and crime-ridden.

Many of the Chinese-Filipinos who have moved to San Juan are also looking for a place where they can live in relative peace and security, away from the kidnappers who have been preying on the Chinese community in Binondo and Quiapo.

Some

Law allows GSIS to provide CTPL

THIS IS IN REACTION TO ATTY. Ernie's (sic) Jan. 25 column on the Compulsory Third Party Liability (CTPL).

The "conservative" proposal recommended by former Insurance Commissioner Benjamin Ramos had been tried before when President Corazon Aquino was in power. P.D.1455, was amended by PD 1830 in 1983, allowing vehicle owners to purchase CTPL policies from any insurance company licensed to do the kind of business. It also scrapped the "pool" or reinsurance. However, as exposed by Sen. Joker Arroyo, many of the CTPL policies that have been issued were fake, rescinding millions of vehicle owners who could not collect on their insurance, while governments also cheated of billions of pesos in taxes.

The "conservative" system is owned by famous and the "cheating house" proposal of incumbent Insurance Commissioner Evangeline Escasinas are essentially the same as they will be manned by the same personnel. A more "conservative" proposal would be only the CTPL policies. Both the private vehicle owner and the government will continue to be victimized.

As Antoni Trillanes III admitted in his theory, the GSIS proposal "is the most practical because vehicle insurance companies would be out, instead of the same time to register our fees." He failed to mention that the groundwork of the CTPL cover is quite limited so that the payment of indemnity to the official carnage or accident victim is assured.

The purpose of taxes is for government to take assured so the taxes will be constitutionally available to the national treasury. But, human cloning, the GSIS model is flawed because "it is illegal for the GSIS to sell insurance to private parties, let alone to private vehicle owners." He is wrong, because the GSIS, also known as the Property Insurance Law, as amended by PD 245, specifically authorizes the GSIS "to engage in the business and operations of all kinds of insurance and reinsurance and all subordinate forms of undertakings to indemnify any person or party against loss, damage or liability, including third party liability ..."

Third party liability insurance is compulsory under the law for the possession of both the vehicle owner and the driver, to a vehicular accident. Hence, government must carry out is that the law is fair and faithfully enforced. The GSIS is in the best position to do this because of its P100 billion worth of assets which no private insurance company can match, and because of its nationwide network of offices that can serve policyholders efficiently and quickly. What is important is that both the policyholder and the government are fully protected.

—JOSCELYN VALERA, senior vice president, Insurance Group, Government Service Insurance System, GSIS Bldg., Roxas City

How was the recovered Marcos wealth spent?

MR. OFFICIAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF Budget and Management has submitted that the recovered Marcos wealth of P57 billion is now "practically gone." (PDI, 1/24/2006) This is indeed alarming, and this raises a level of urgency.

How did the government, specifically the Department of Agrarian Reform, spend that enormous sum?

Sixty percent of the funds are to be screened by the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program are extension funds. Is not previous extension with the DAR? Also, it was said that the reason for the undisbursed portion of agrarian funds was the CARP is the lack of budget.

What happened then to the billions of pesos that have purportedly been allocated for this purpose? Were the DBM agencies using P1.15 billion remains of the funds and this will be used by the CARP this year. What will happen then to the CARP release legal existence (cap to 2008 only)?

Economic farmers are now asking what the department intends to do with the remaining budget for this year. What really happened to the bulk of the budget that had been allotted for CARP? Farmers had been informed before the 2004 presidential election that the DAR that the funds from the government. Marcos wealth remains unsolved, but now the DBM is saying that is practically gone.

We would like to commend the senators for bringing out all this. Just like them, we have every right to know how every centavo of the recovered funds was spent. Also, it used to finance the candidacy of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in 2004? Did the P57.0 billion spree for the silver years from those funds as well? How did the government spend those large amount?

—JESUS A. CENDAÑO, program officer I, Central Industry Reform (CIRD) Movement Inc., 84 Malingap Extension, Barangay Central, Q.

LETTERS

Who is stupid?

IN A RECENT TV INTERVIEW, ALfredo Germinary Road Gonzalez, statesmanship on the public matter for an end to the Visiting Forces Agreement, blurted out: "Bingit dito [here] kasi nila sundronahan ang bansa."

Boy is it stupidity or dual information? Is a crime that dishonors a fellow Filipino? Is it stupidity to say that the VFA cut-tipped Senators is it ignorance of the interests of the visiting US forces at the expense of the interests of Filipinos? Is it stupidity to utter the crime of the sovereignty of our nation because many of our government leaders cannot stand up to the Americans?

No, this is not to order Gonzalez's stupidity or ignorance against our people. This is to explain to him why there is a public outcry for an end to the stupid VFA. That is to make Gonzalez understand that the public outcry against the VFA is legitimate and just. If Gonzalez still has his marbles, it would be easy for him to understand that patriotism is not stupidity. And he should not look down on the people. It is they who are in the best position to see the weakness of any law because it is they who suffer when laws are crafted without taking into account the nation's welfare and sovereignty.

Gonzalez should be reminded that there is a challenge right now to have the Visiting Forces Agreement declared unconstitutional and scrap US servicemen from abusing Philippine sovereignty rights within our territory. And the Department of Justice has a crucial role to play in such a case.

Also, Gonzalez should bear in mind that Cabinet members are public servants. They owe their positions and loyalty to the people and not to anybody else, not even to the President who appointed them; least of all, to the American government.

—PETER MANGUBAT, executive director, Ibon Foundation Inc., 2nd Floor, Phelan Building, Quezon Avenue, Q.

Insensitive to Palaweños' rights

WITH REFERENCE TO THE NEWS story titled "SC called on to break Malampaya impasse" (PDI, 1/24/06), Palawan's provincial government, led by Gov. Joel Reyes, had foreseen this the national government would bring to the Supreme Court the issue of our province's right over the Malampaya gas. It is a settled position that the Malampaya gas field is within the territorial jurisdiction of our province, thus our are entitled to a 40-percent (GR share) of the revenues generated from this resource, as provided for by the Philippine Constitution and the Local Government Code.

Last Dec. 16, Branch 95 of the Puerto Princesa Regional Trial Court affirmed our legal rights to the 40-percent LGU share, citing the Constitution, the Local Government Code, RA 7611, as well as past administrative issuances and rulings, recognizing Palawan's jurisdiction over the Malampaya gas field and, therefore, the province's legal share. The court also granted our motion "To Render Full Accounting of the Actual Payments of Shell Philippines Exploration, B.V. to the Bureau of Treasury Department of Finance, and to Francis and Place in Interior Account the Forty Percent (40-percent) (GR Share)." This motion is necessary to prevent the dissipation of the funds.

A danger to legal profession

THERE COULD HAVE BEEN SEVeral factors that facilitated the escape of the four Oakwood mutineer rebels from a Pasi Bonifacio detention facility (sic, definitely, former Basil Pelaez's insistence on protect the rights of the rebels was not one of them).

Lt. Gen. Hermogenes Esperon enjoined his subordinates and activists toward human rights lawyers when he made the baseless and false allegation that the "continuous interference" of Public in the plan of the military to resolve the four military rebels or another intervention facility exit of them in their escape. The statement of General Esperon was a form of harassment. It was a direct psychological assault meant to discourage Public-Interest Lawyers from their constant in the military rebels, and to hide the possibility that the escape might have been done with the help of military personnel inside Fort Bonifacio.

Esperon is a danger to the legal profession.

—RAMON TE, 17 Harold Homes St., Bella Vista Homes II, Sauyo Bros, Caloocan City

LAND BANK OF THE PHILIPPINES
ang Bangkong may Kinabukasan Bayan

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

ITB No.	Item /Description	Approved Budget	Sources of Funds
2005-12-021	256 units Document Scanner with Barcode Software (PC)	P 45,312,000.00	GFI Funds
2005-096	1 lot Supply & Technical Specifications (plus) Materials, Tools and Equipment to Reinstall/Relocate of the ventilation system of the Salcedo Transaction Unit (LBP-STU) at the Ground Floor of the STU complete with supply of labor and necessary materials for one (1) year	4,500,000.00	GFI Funds

Prospective bidders should have completed at least one (1) similar project within the last two (2) years. All qualified bidders will be invited to attend a pre-bid conference. The Bidding Documents as well as the Preliminary Examination of Bids shall comply with the requirements of the Revised Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of Republic Act 9184, otherwise known as the "Government Procurement Reform Act".

Bidding Documents are available and may be obtained from March 23, 2006 at 1:00 PM upon payment of a non-refundable fee of P5,000.00 each. The fee for the Bidding Documents may be sourced from the General Services Department, 2nd Floor, LANDBANK Plaza Building, Interior 6, Gil Puyat Avenue, Makati City. Bidding Documents are available for sale only from 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM starting March 23, 2006 until 2:00 PM on April 13, 2006. Bids must be submitted not later than 2:00 PM on April 13, 2006 at the Office of the Chairman, Bids and Awards Committee, 2nd Floor, LANDBANK Plaza, Interior 6, Gil Puyat Avenue, Makati City. Late bids shall not be accepted.

Interested bidders are encouraged to attend the Pre-Bid Conference scheduled on February 15, 2006 at the 20th Floor, Conference Room, LANDBANK Plaza, Makati, Manila.

All prospective bidders' Eligibility Statement and Screening, Bid Security, Performance Security, Pre-Bidding Conference(s), Evaluation of Bids, Post Qualification and Award of Contract shall be governed by the conditions of RA 9184 and its Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR).

LANDBANK reserves the right to reject any or all bids, to declare a failure of bidding or not award the contract to the lowest or highest bidder without incurring any liability to the affected bidder or bidders or any obligation to inform the affected bidder or bidders of the grounds for such action by the LANDBANK.

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All acts of letters to the editor are requested to include their complete address and telephone or pager number or e-mail address for verification purposes. The inquirer will not publish any letter unless such information is supplied.

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PHILRENEW

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND BIDD

Approved Budget Php1,875,000.00

Philippine Renewable Energy Development Corporation (PHILRENEW) invites prospective bidders to apply and submit bids for the supply and delivery of the following:

Item No.	Description	Quantity
1	Mini Hydro Power Plant Equipment	1 lot

Prospective bidders should have completed at least one (1) similar project within the last two (2) years. All qualified bidders will be invited to attend a pre-bid conference. The Bidding Documents as well as the Preliminary Examination of Bids shall comply with the requirements of the Revised Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of Republic Act 9184, otherwise known as the "Government Procurement Reform Act".

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COMMITTEE ON BIDS AND AWARDS

Insensitive hospital

I WENT FOR CONSULTATION TO A PRIVATE whose office is located at the annex building of an expensive hospital. I am a diabetic and I suffered a stroke last August 2005. So much, I have been confined to a wheelchair because of my inability to walk.

Because of my condition, I have to wait in the hospital more than the usual times. To my consternation, I discovered that there are no toilets for handicapped in the annex. This is highly unacceptable.

For such an expensive hospital not to have toilets for the handicapped is highly irregular. Why, even the public of Manila have comfort rooms for the handicapped! Why doesn't this hospital have at least one?

—SUSAN HERRERO, Susnhe@yahoo.com

Amazing victory

MANNY PACQUIAO'S VICTORY AGAINST Mexican's Erik Morales was a cause for jubilation for all Filipinos here and around the world. It also inspired our young boxers who consider him their boxing idol.

His meteoric rise from poverty to success, through sheer determination, discipline and hard work, has brought honor and glory for our nation and people, as well as fame and fortune for himself and his family. It was simply amazing!

To Manny Pacquiao, more success and good luck!

—LLOYD L. ASA, 31-Y PBP Cooperative Condominium, 6836 Avenue, Ortigas Center, Pasig City

INQUIRER Northern Luzon

John Jon Bandayrel
Aurea Cruz Balandis B. Fernandez

'Clark dev't to decongest Metro Manila'

By John correspondents in Northern and Central Luzon gathered on Jan. 13 in Angeles City for a round-table discussion with key policy makers in the Metro Clark area on issues concerning the development of the Clark Special Economic Zone.

Antonio Ng, Clark Development Corp. president and chief executive officer; Victor Jose Lacson, CDC executive vice president; Danilo Francia, Clark International Airport Corp. president; and Levy Leus, Pampanga Chamber of Commerce and Industry president, spoke on what lies ahead in the next half of the Subic-Clark development corridor.

Excerpts:

ON THE SUPREME COURT ruling that tax incentives applied only to the Subic Bay Freeport, not in the Clark Special Economic Zone?

Ng: There's a joint resolution of Congress confirming the original legislative intent of Republic Act No. 7227 (Bases Conversion Development Authority law). We used this in our motion for reconsideration we filed with the Supreme Court. The (Bureau of Internal Revenue) and (Bureau of Customs) commissioners issued a letter on how people advising them not to take any premature action until the Supreme Court's ruling was final. So it's a status quo.

The permanent solution is through legislation. There has been a series of committee hearings that ended two Senate bills—one for giving incentives in tax-free areas and the other for amending RA 7227 so that the tax incentives could extend to Clark.

President Macapagal-Arroyo has certified this as a priority bill.

On the revival of the Expo Pilipino?

Ng: We're working with the Department of Trade and Industry to put up a trade exhibit in 2,400 sqm of space to showcase all the best products from the different regions of the Philippines. The Ancient Island and Colonial Island will be taken over by the Nayong Pilipino, which will invest P60 million to develop the area. We want to get it up-to-date video and laser exciting effects. The 23,000-seat amphitheater will have monthly events. We plan to open the aisles to prevent illegal entrants during concerts.

On airlines now operating at Clark's Diosdado Macapagal International Airport?

Lacson: The budget airlines are creating markets. For example, overseas Filipino workers in Asian cities now go home four times a year to see their families because fares are cheap at P5,000 or less per trip. Or they bring their families over on weekends. More satellite-investor centers are also able to afford the fares.

Before the start of the budget airlines in Clark, only 7 percent of Malaysians traveled. That's 750,000 out of 23 million passengers. There has been a 5-percent increase of late. In the Philippines, we are 80 million plus. If 7 percent of Filipinos travel, that's another 800,000 passengers. Philippine Airlines flights to Malaysia are now affordable because of the low fares to Subic.

The flights to and from Clark are cheap because there are no frills—no use of travel agents, no food during flight, baggage are limited (a 15 kilograms), little administrative costs, and airport fees are lower because the DMIA is a secondary airport.

We are developing Clark as regional base for the airlines and as a northern hub. Asian Spirit is now building one. So there will be flights from Clark to Laoag, Baguio, Ilocos Point and Tuguegarao.

Cebu Pacific came there years ago. There were no budget flights then so it was an evident, Cebu Pacific is studying its routes.

On the CIAC and CDC being separate entities

Francia: Airports in other countries are run by separate authorities. Our airport system is so rich, and is so full of possibilities. So the CDC is in front of those possibilities, it's better for the CDC to be a separate corporation but a subsidiary of the CDC. That way, both agencies do specific jobs.

Clark has four engines of growth, and the biggest, which promises the other three (industrial, tourism, infrastructure), is aviation. To ensure that the aviation area of DMIA is developed according to international standards by 2030, we have to look forward to what is modern in 2030, not what is modern today. That needs a complete set of trained people to oversee the development of the airport.

Ng: To promote cooperative effort, Mr. Lacson and I are part of the CIAC board. We're satisfying their requirements.

On the relocation of the Philippine Air Force away from the DMIA

Francia: They don't like the plan. In the first place, the Air Force people feel that they were sent away from Manila because of the construction of the Ninoy Aquino International Airport's Terminal 3. They were sent to Clark when it was considered an evil. Clark Mr. President's (1901 inspiration). But they understand this completely (and now, what they are saying is in all airports around the world, there is an Air Force contingent.

The talks now center on cooperative effort leading at what the interest is for both the Air Force and Clark. It is very clear that the Air Force will stay but in smaller contingent than what it is right now. They will be allowed to develop a bigger area in Clark that is closely related to aviation (like Air Base Jet Fleet/Subic/Pampanga) surveyed by Subic/Pampanga Bay.

Ng: For the strategic defense of northern Philippines and for airport operations, it is better to retain some of the Air Force in Clark. There will be an area pullout. What we will do is to optimize the amount we use as a central business district.

On the DMIA and Philippine International Air Terminals Co.'s project at Nuvo Terminal 1

Ng: There is a declaration (by Senator Pimentel Jinkai Bunyan) that the DMIA will be a premiere airport. But the Pasay contract calls for a 35-million-passenger capacity by three years. That halted the development in Clark. But government has taken over the terminal project. At the DMIA, the passenger terminal will be expanded and completed by June 2008. We are encouraging investors for the full-scale development of the DMIA. Transportation Secretary Leandro Mendoza, who is the chair of CIAC, has already announced that by 2015, the DMIA will become an international gateway to be developed complementary with Clark.

Francia: In the long range, which is 2015, it will be an international gateway to the medium-range. It will be used for repair and maintenance businesses, (and) in the short range, for low-cost flights and express cargo.

Lacson: We will also be getting the big airlines for operate in the DMIA as there are cases.

On the impact and spillover of development from Clark

Leus: Clark will provide the promise of the future and a lot of development that will help promote local businesses.

Downtown, Clark also tends to become a competitive, particularly in the hiring of employees, because non-taxing jobs are available.

The development in Clark will help decongest Metro Manila.

(But) some development there are not consistent with owned by local traders. Take, for example, the presence of Shoemart. They feel that the presence of SM will affect small to medium-size enterprises. Those SMEs are very important components of every community, every region because these provide businesses in the area ... they feel that one (SM mall) is enough, two (malls) are too much for Pampanga.

On the synergy of Clark and Subic in terms of administration

Leus: When I was with the Bases Conversion Development Authority (as a director), we realized the need to unite the two. That came about when we had Base Dialit Bay Metropolitan Authority) Chair Francisco Licudine III to coordinate (Subic, Clark, (O) under the Department of Trade and Industry. We can expect positive development.

Ng: Subic and Clark will have to work together often. The Subic-Clark Connector monitor corridor project is a vehicle. We held a series of planning meetings with Subic officials, and we agreed to have an office in each zone.

We look for opportunities that can help each zone. I believe there is a serious effort to work together.

Right now in Subic, they're running out of land as they tell Clark. And we're under one umbrella now at the DTI ... We were placed under the DTI because the President has so many work ... we are 320 agencies that report to the Office of the President. It's a smart thing to put Clark and Subic under the DTI, which has a representation of being professionally managed.

On Clark competing with the Bases in developing Subic as a trade partner

Ng: Let's not fight over a small pie. Let's make the pie big.

On The Subic-Clark-Tarlac expressway project that connects the two economic and the Luisita Industrial Park in Tarlac

Lacson: Two weeks ago, we flew by helicopter to determine what's really happening. We saw the highway already paved in some areas. This is a positive development because it's a source of labor when all of these will get concentrated. the work will eventually be finished by 2007.

On the presence of toxic wastes left by the American military in Clark

Ng: In all the investment applications, there's always the ISO14 certification. We deputize people to make sure businesses comply with environmental standards. A two-year study in 1993-94 identified where the risks are and what steps to make.

When we looked at the sites, it turned out that in Subalens, construction debris had been mined by the Americans with pesticide control. In another area, they used oil contamination. During the time of the Americans, this was the place where they practiced fire drills and immediately capability to fight fire. The big wells were dried. This is a non-issue.

> 'Clark will provide the promise of the future and a lot of dev't that will help promote local businesses'

CLARK policy makers (from left) Antonio Ng, Levy Leus, Victor Jose Lacson and Danilo Francia

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INSPIRATION COMES STANDARD

Across the NATION

Gloria orders ₱1B released for areas ruined by 'Agaton'

CAMARTIAN CITY—PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo on Tuesday announced the release of a total of P1 billion to the National Disaster Coordinating Council for flood-control infrastructure projects and agricultural assistance to calamity-prone areas this year.

Benito Ebuy, presidential adviser for North Luzon, said Mrs Arroyo announced the release of P500 million in budget for additional flood-control projects and agricultural assistance at the end of a meeting with local officials of Isabel, Nueva Vizcaya, Nueva Ecija and Aurora in the Philippine Army's First Infantry Division in Nueva Ecija.

Before inaugurating the Cagayan City hall site in Nueva Ecija, the President said the war-ravaged province would receive some P500 million to reconstruct and other forms of help to recover in homes who suffered losses.

"I already called [secretary] Defensor's [Mike] head of budget and authorized him to release the amount. We want to help our farmers to rise as soon [as] possible," she said in a brief message in Cagayan City where she officiated in the inauguration of that city's city hall.

She said the true extent of the devastation brought by flooding and rains in the province.

The President said she was surprised that Nueva Ecija, among others, will receive a big amount from the funds.

Reports from the provincial agricultural officer in Nueva Ecija said P640 million worth of crops were damaged in the province.

Isabela, the other province which suffered crop destruction, reported losses amounting to P452 million. The other provinces which reported damages were Cagayan and Aurora.

Ebuy and military officers said reports that Mt Aurora went on its third stage of its 4 Nyolfic check on soldiers were set wat.

Jaroslaw Bragas and Sheryll Arejola, PDI Central Luzon Desk

LUCKY DANCE
Performers carry one of a pair of dragons given to Baguio City for good luck during the celebration of the Lunar New Year in the city.

Army says 8 NPAs slain in Tarlac, Negros clashes

By Tarcoma Orejas
PDI Central Luzon Desk

EIGHT SUSPECTED COMMUNIST REBELS were killed while three soldiers were wounded in separate clashes in Tarlac and Negros Occidental, the military said.

The New People's Army's Hukbo Mapagpalaya ng Bayan in Tarlac and they were still confirming the death toll reported to the military, they said their reports indicated there were casualties among civilians in Barangay Sta. Ines West where the Tarlac Code Red was at 5 a.m.

In a village in Kauswagan, Negros Occidental, the military said a rebel was killed and five others were injured.

Col. Rolando Dasia, commander of the Army's 702nd Infantry Brigade, said in a phone interview that earlier Tarlac gunfights. The firefights reached Umiray by phone while he was directing operations from one of the evacuation sites at 2:30 p.m.

But Lt. Col. Ferdie Manera, spokesperson of the military's Northern Luzon Command, said the firefights had reports received by the Nolcom indicated that 18 rebels were killed in Cle-Jockey.

"We have recovered 18 bodies and suspected firearms from the rebels," an Associated Press report quoted Manera as saying.

Dasia, in the AP report, said the fighting broke out after residents in the Ignacio tipped off soldiers that a group of NPA rebels were in the area.

Manera, in an interview with the Inquirer, said the encounters happened after the evacuation operation when the NPAs attacked the police station and evacuation areas.

Capt. Angelo de la Cruz, AFP Civil Relations Team leader based in Barrio Cruz said one soldier was injured in the Negros clash, the marine said.

Lt. Col. Gregory Cayetano, commander of the Army's 71st Infantry Battalion that engaged the rebels, said the clashes continued through Tuesday afternoon in Barangay Danel, Janiuay.

Military reports said soldiers recovered at least six M-16 rifles from the encounter sites.

Meanwhile, a staff member of the Bantay Ceasefire group Kasapulan in Tarlac, said soldiers supplanted the entry and exit of vehicles and people in the three villages while patrols operations were ongoing.

The Reuters wrote the clashes broke that erupted last year in Tarlac, one of the known strongholds of the Communist Party of the Philippines in Central Luzon.

Delia Calanda said soldiers were on patrol when they encountered the rebels around 6 a.m.

He said soldiers of the 81st Infantry Battalion were hunting the other rebels after that following the clash. INQ's report from Bacolod Sigue Bacaro, PDI Visayas Bureau

ROUNDUP

New teaching approaches

DENGO CITY—At least 20 teachers in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) are to begin attending training methods professionals on the use of their new computer knowledge in their classrooms. The project is a joint effort by the Department of Education (DepEd) in Maguindanao (DepEd-ARMM) and Information Technology Foundation for Education (ITFE), and will operate from 2006. The teachers have recently trained in basic computer use under the "IBM Bibentor" scholarship" project. ARMM minister Ahmad Ali Lucman said improving the education sector in the region would make it better known for its citizens. Emma Jay Ramos, PDI Mindanao Bureau

Gang members nabbed

STA. CRUZ, Laguna—Police have arrested four members of a gang which set fire to Cecilia Jalbuena's home in Barangay Pagsawitan, Lumban, Laguna, on Feb. 19. Chief Supt. Antonio Rodriguez, Calabarzon police director, identified the suspects as members of Commando Boys. Police said the gang members set fire to the house after they had been denied entry into the house. Rodriguez said the suspects were charged with arson. Police said they are still looking for two other members of the gang. Ronnie Perez, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

Taxi receipts pushed

LEGAZPI CITY—Despite strong opposition from operators, the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB) nevertheless through with its order to require all taxicabs to issue official receipts to their passengers, Commissioner Rey Joseph Santiago said. The plan is not only for whim and fun but also to monitor the fares, the taxes transportation and consumer affairs committee also has added to a settlement. The LTFRB has ordered all cab operators to upgrade their meters with printers and modems or face fines. Ed Francis Arevalo, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

NPA rebs kill cop

CAMP PEÑAFRANCIA, Laguna—A member of a police anti-insurgency unit was shot by three suspected New People's Army rebels in Batangas, Batangas on Jan. 21, Chief Supt. Antonio Rodriguez, Calabarzon police director, said. SPO1 Bonnie Fabro, 40, suspected by the 403rd Provincial Mobile Group based in Barangay Palico, Lipa City, was ambushed by the rebels from Barangay Palico, Batangas at around 6:30 a.m. when the latter noticed him on board a jeep. He added his death and physical wounds on his right cheek and the rest of the bullets hit his left chest. 32 bullet wounds on different parts of the body. The suspects Berlio Barangan, Rondevan Sapit, Rolando Bag, and a PMG group member, said Cabra took another death threats from the rebels. Marlon Ramos, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

Mayor's aide killed

CALAMBA CITY—A security aide of Mrs. Laguna Mayor Bonnie Hernandez was gunned down this morning outside his residence at Los Baños, Laguna on Jan. 23. Jun Bolano, police chief, said Insp. Marvin Sanz said Fernando Limuelo, a bodyguard of Ramos, was shot while riding a bicycle along the national road in Barangay Bitaoban when two armed men confronted a motorcycle-riding rebel and fired several shots at him. He died at around 7:30 a.m. The two suspects escaped to the direction of Bay town. Marlon Ramos, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

City withholds permits

LUCENA City—The Lucena City government has withheld the renewal of business permits and licenses of at least 40 business establishments in the city for violating the local "Waste Management Act of 2000," Dante Sua, head of Task Force 6002, a group of "environmental police-men," said the establishments have made illegal dumps there. Sua said the establishments have committed environmental violations and will be fined between P5,000 to P10,000 each. Sua said he had asked the city's Business Permit and Licensing Office to force applicants for renewal of business permits to pay fines before they can be given. Last year, Mayor Ramon Talaga Jr. deputized a group of violators to monitor businesses and establishments that do not maintain clean the buildings within a five-meter radius. The task force members have also been tasked to install drums of pipes, boxes, and bicycles that do not have trash cans and persons caught littering and tossing out garbage after a few seconds will be fined. Walter L.A. Pill Southern Luzon Bureau

Ateneo reunion

MEMBERS of the Ateneo de Davao High School Class '56 will celebrate the golden jubilee of their graduation at the Marco Polo Hotel in Davao City from Feb. 3 to 5. Class secretary Isabel Amado Gerilla said the week-long celebration highlight of the affair is a Mass to be held at the Ateneo de Davao High School's Regional Museum, Escuela Cir. on Feb. 4 by Ateneo de Davao President Fr. Joaquin Bernas, S.J. Other Gerilla said. (0918-1908; 0927-675-1707; and Amado Gerilla, Davao City, 082-305-8004; 082-221-1186).

Republic of the Philippines
Kagawaran ng Tanggulang Pambansa
Department of National Defense

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID
DND-Project Procurement of Services

1. The Department of National Defense, through DND-Project Bid and Awards Committee, invites eligible service providers/contractors/consultants to apply for eligibility and to bid for the following projects:

General Services for CY 2006 (Re-Bidding)

Name of Project	Description	Approved Budget for Contract (ABC)
1. Trucked Drinking Water	Servicing of Trucked Drinking Water for DND compounds	P1,000,000.00
2. Subscription Services	Subscription of foreign magazines and newspapers for DND-Philippines	P 1,000,000.00
	TOTAL	Php 2,000,000.00

2. The contract/s shall be for one (1) year.

a) Activity	Schedule	Venue	Time
Issuance of the Invitation	Posting/Publication	26 Jan. - 10 Feb. 2006	8:00 AM-5:00 PM
Deadline for Submission/Opening of Bids	DND Action Office	10 February 2006	2:00 PM-3:00 PM
Bid Evaluation	These activities is conducted with the prescribed period as stated in the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) Part A, Article 24(a)		
Post-Qualification			
Awarding of Contract (if issued)			

b) Bid documents may be obtained upon payment of a non-refundable fee in the amount of indicated for each lot, payable to the "DND-Project Bids and Awards Committee". Prospective Bidders may purchase Bid Documents, Terms and Conditions of Reference (TOR) at the following venue:

Name of Project	Cost of Bidding Documents
Electrical Services	
1. Trucked Drinking Water	P50.00
2. Subscription Services	1,000.00

Bidders who have purchased the bidding documents for the previous bidding (many of the above projects) may re-submit previous bid documents for re-evaluation, post-qualification and award, subject to the conditions stipulated in the DND-Project BAC Secretariat.

c) The eligibility Check/Screening as well as the Preliminary Examination of Bids shall use non-discretionary "pass/fail" criteria as specified in the Implementing Rules and Regulations of RA 9184 for particular Lot/Item Eligibility Statement and Screening, Bid Security, Performance Security, Prebidding Conference, Evaluation of Bids, Post-Qualification and Award of Contract shall be governed by the rules and regulations contained in RA 9184, its Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) and other applicable issuances of the GOP.

d) The DND-Project reserves the right to reject any or all bids, waive any formality and award the Contract/s to the bidder whose proposal is in the best interest of the government as evaluated by the DND-Project Bids and Awards Committee (DND-Project BAC).

e) The Invitation is also posted in the DND Procurement Service website at www.pcso.gov.ph/psd/psd_service.asp, and the DND website in accordance with the RIR-A of R.A. 9184. Further, it shall maintain posting of Competitive Bidding Invitations at the Department's Public Information Bulletin Board.

(Sgd.) ARNOLD LUIS ADUCAYEN GARCIA
Chairman, DND-Project BAC

Mindoro folk hold caravan vs Crew mines

CITY OF CALAPAN—ABOUT 10,000 MINdorenos joined a caravan Monday to mark the signing of a 25-year mining moratorium passed four years ago and to denounce their mining opposition to the entry of the Mindoro Nickel Project of Crew Development (Agnihong Mining Corp. to the province.

Led by Bishop Pedro Arigo and Governor Rodolfo Mendoza, the Apostolic Vicariate of Calapan and Aljuarta Lalim (ex-Mina (Manila), the caravan left north from Calapan at about 8:30 a.m. and passed through the towns of Baco, Naujan, Victoria and Socorro, while another group started out south from the town of Pinamalayan.

In a statement sent to the Inquirer, Alcasid demanded the suspension of exploration activities by the Agnihong Mining Corp. for the nickel project and the immediate cancellation of the Mineral Production Sharing Agreement (MPSA) granted to the corporation by the Office of the President and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

The caravan converged in the gymnasium in the tourist quality of Naujan, formation of Vice President Salvador Castro, and planned site for the processing plant and local-based tailings dam of the Crew Development.

The province's municipal mayors, Naujan mayor, Pandalangan members, governor, vice governors, congressmen from the two districts, students, clergymen, government employees, non-government organizations and people's representatives joined the caravan.

Window Boy, Aurao Pandiganan said it was the first time "the people of Mindoro have united to show their opposition to the project, which has no social acceptability."

Mayor Alex Asuncion of Polo town, who is also vice president of the League of Mayors in Oriental Mindoro, said he would do his best to get the help of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) and Malacañang.

Bishop Arigo, a staff member of the Bantay Ceasefire group Kasapulan in Tarlac, said soldiers supplanted the entry and exit of vehicles and people in the three villages while patrols operations were ongoing.

The Reuters wrote the clashes broke that erupted last year in Tarlac, one of the known strongholds of the Communist Party of the Philippines in Central Luzon.

Delia Calanda said soldiers were on patrol when they encountered the rebels around 6 a.m.

He said soldiers of the 81st Infantry Battalion were hunting the other rebels after that following the clash. INQ's report from Bacolod Sigue Bacaro, PDI Visayas Bureau

5 hurt in Mandaluyong gas tank explosion

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

THE SOUND OF AN EXPLOSION shattered the silence in Barangay Hagdang Bato, Mandaluyong City after midnight yesterday.

The blast, caused by a leaking liquified petroleum gas (LPG) tank, broke the windows of several houses and burned a two-story house to the ground. Five persons, including a 9-year-old boy, were injured, FO3 Renato Tabloy told the reporter yesterday.

"The home owner looked as if it was bombed," Tabloy said.

One of the five injured, Noel del Rosario, 34, said he had just parked his truck at about 1:20 a.m. yesterday when he smelled gas.

He was trying to know where it was coming from when the explosion occurred.

Rosario suffered burns all over his body. His wife Marilyn, 32, and their children Allan, 17 and Alberto Jr., 9, who were sleeping when the incident happened were also hurt after the house collapsed.

Fearing the sound and feeling the impact, neighbors thought their area had been bombed.

The victims were brought to the Mandaluyong City Medical Center because of the serious injuries, investigators have yet to talk to Rosario. Tabloy said the leak could have been caused by the strong typhoon that hit the area last June concerning the LPG tank to the burner. He advised the homeowners to always check the hoses connecting their burners and tanks. He said tanks should also be located in well-ventilated areas.

Dog meat can be dangerous to one's health

By Margaux C. Ortiz

EATING DOG MEAT IS NOT ONLY CRUEL TO man's best friend. It could also be fatal to man himself.

An animal welfare group issued this warning yesterday following the death of a 6-year-old girl who was given dog meat by her neighbors two days before Christmas.

"Eating dog meat can cause death especially if the animal is rabid," Animal Kingdom Foundation Inc. (AKF) officer in charge Susanne Llanera said during a press conference at the Bantay Bata 163 in Manila.

Kenna Mae Ramos, 6, of Barangay Holy Spirit, Quezon City died after her neighbors gave her dog meat cooked as pulutan (appetizer).

Rosalita Ramos, the girl's father, said his daughter suffered from high fever and exhibited symptoms of rabies shortly after eating the meat. Ramos was taken to the hospital on Dec. 13 but died after a few hours, he added.

"We had many dreams for her and now she's gone," the father said in Bisaya. "I am now appealing to everyone to stop eating dogs to avoid the kind of tragedy."

AKF chief veterinarian Winston Sumaoang said the rabies virus may have entered the girl's system through a bodily cavity. When a person eats or throws the meat of a dog infected with rabies, the virus enters the nerve endings through a cavity, a heart vault or a cut in the gums, Sumaoang added.

The virus then passes through the lymph nodes and endocrines in the brain, resulting in the victim's death. Symptoms could take years to manifest, damages the cerebral nervous system, which includes the brain and spinal cord. The victim must visit the typical medication period for rabies can be as short as 4 to 6 weeks or as long as 1 to 3 years.

However, he stressed that eating healthy dogs could be as dangerous as eating rabid ones.

"Dog meat traders butcher the animals in unsanitary slaughterhouses," Llanera said, stressing that consumers could suffer from food poisoning after eating dirty meat. She added that hospitals rarely document cases of food poisoning due to eating dog meat. "They only indicate that the patients died of simple food poisoning," Llanera said.

The AKF officials also said butchers who set up dog meat could be infected with the virus if they forget to wash their hands and touch their eyes or lips. MC founder and president Charles Wechsberg said the government has failed to set up more awareness campaigns against the Animal Welfare Law or Republic Act 8485. "I think this is an absolute disgrace," Wechsberg said. "The government should be doing its job in saving the lives of both dogs and human beings." RA 8485 penalizes violators, including dog meat traders, with a penalty P1,000 fine or six months imprisonment. "Dogs deserve love and compassion not food," the AKF official said.

Artists bat for reopening of Arroceros Park

By Tina G. Santos

SEVERAL PROFESSIONAL ARTISTS FESTIVALS appealed to the city government of Manila to reopen to the public the centennial Arroceros Forest Park.

Leo Rhoderick, one of the artists who showed to show inspiration from the park's lush foliage, said the park's closure has deprived them of a place where they can exercise their craft.

"We come here for inspiration. Besides, it's a public place. It should be kept open to the public," he told reporters. "I hope the city officials can understand that and heed our plea."

The park has been closed for several months because of the ongoing construction of a musicians' center in the area.

Before its closure, however, Mayor Lito Atienza said he had visited the park every weekend to show an emergency exit route, the Pasig River and other violators. Right now, they have to pass through a narrow alley at the foot of Quezon Bridge to get inside the park.

"Not many people know the way to get here. All they can see is that the gates are closed. Before, students and professional artists came here to clean areas, but not anymore," Rhoderick said.

He added that even their livelihood was somehow affected by the park's closure. Some of the proceeds from the sale of their artwork went to Wildest Foundation, the park caretaker.

Mayor is locked in a court battle with the Manila City government. Mayor claims it has been given a 15-year contract to develop the park but the local government said that the contract is not valid.

SM rejoinder to Fairview illegal deep well issue

SM PRIME HOLDINGS, INC., THE OWNER of SM Fairview, denied a news report on the use of illegal deep wells that appeared in the Jan. 23, 2006 issue of the Inquirer (Metro section).

Findings of an inspection by the National Water Resources Board last Dec. 19, 2005 showed that Greenwell no. 1 was shut down as shown by the flow meter which was not registering, according to a statement sent to the Inquirer by SM legal counsel Epifanio Bautista.

"On the issue of availability of water supply from Maynilad Water Services Inc. (Mayniland), Maynilad's available tapping point for water supply to SM Fairview is among those SM Fairview. Maynilad will not bring the tapping point of Maynilad water supply to the SM supply pipe at the SM Fairview unless SM will shoulder the cost of the service pipe connection up to the tapping point of water supply at SM Fairview. As per Maynilad's annual estimate, this will amount to P2,875,000.00, inclusive of the guarantee deposit. A letter of request for the extension of connection fees and guarantee deposit attributed to the delay in the construction of the Maynilad water supply to SM Fairview."

METROBRIEFS

No to garbage burning

QUEZON City residents that garbage as utensils or inflammable materials and up in jail. Two suspensions have been issued by the city government during the burning of waste on streets or sidewalks—only property that is allowed to be burned by the city government is the dry leaves from their garbage.

Councilor Ramon Medalla, chairman of the committee on Public Order and Safety, said the ordinance was passed by the City Council in 2004 and was signed by Mayor Feliciano Belmonte Jr. in 2005.

Violators will be fined P1,000 on the first offense and P5,000 on the second offense. Subsequent offenses, however, will mean either a P5,000 fine or imprisonment from one month to one year, depending on the discretion of the court.

—DJ Yap

Roldon hearing reset

LAWYERS of actor-cop Roldan Quezon City Prosecutor's Office to ask for more time to study the allegations against their client.

Roldan is facing charges of illegal possession of firearms and the San Andres couple are witnesses in the Feb. 28 trial.

Roldan, who had testified against Roldan and Sandhi Wang, is detained at the Philippine National Police Custodial Center for the alleged gunrunning.

Edson C. Tandoc

Resins shipment seized

EIGHT container vans loaded with plastic resins were intercepted by agents of the Bureau of Customs and Immigration Service (CIS) as they were being brought out of the Manila International Container Port (MICP) Tuesday last week. Agents of the Bureau of Customs and Immigration and Deportation Service said he received a tip from another agent that a plastic resin shipment from China would be imported out of the MICP using tampered import permits from the Cavite Export Processing Zone Authority. Acting on the tip, the joint operation check of the Management Group based Ports Area will verify the report. The 14-hour surveillance and undercover operations at the MICP and Cagayan were called to the interception of the eight container vans.

Leila D. Salaverri

QC wants Pacquiao

AT THE RATE he is going, boxing icon Manny Pacquiao will soon be named Quezon City's adopted son following his victory over Ghanaian boxer Eric Morales in Las Vegas. Quezon City is the latest local government unit to jump on the "Pacman" bandwagon, with two councilors preparing to have him declared as an adopted son of the city. Pacquiao, a native of General Santos City, has already been adopted by Manila and Pasay City. In a proposed resolution, Councilor Ma. Victoria Daniela Lopez Sagalongos, Barangay Kaunlaran president Jose Mario Cardenas pushed for the conferment of honorary citizenship for the boxing champ in recognition of the city's need for fostering "honor, prestige and recognition" for the country.

—DJ Yap

PHILIPPINE DEPOSIT INSURANCE CORPORATION

NOTICE TO THE DEPOSITORS OF THE CLOSED RURAL BANK OF 21ST CENTURY (BALAGTAS), INC.

1. Pursuant to Monetary Board Resolution No. 19 dated January 19, 2006 ordering the closure of the Rural Bank of 21st Century (Balagtas), Inc. (RBC), the Philippine Deposit Insurance Corporation (PDIC) will start its administration for the purchase of claims for insured deposits in the closed RBC on Wednesday, January 25, 2006.

2. Depositors are requested to proceed directly to the following convenient offices where they can file their claims with the PDIC representatives during office hours (8:00 AM to 5:00 PM), from Monday to Friday, except holidays.

RBC Office/Branch	Payout Site/Address	Duration of Initial Disbursement
Balagtas Head Office	Rm. 28 San Jose Building, Bulacan	Jan. 26, 2006 to Feb. 3, 2006
Guiguinto Branch	Bagumbayan, Bulacan, Bulacan	Jan. 26, 2006 to Feb. 3, 2006
Malolos Branch	Municipal Bulacan, Bulacan	Jan. 26, 2006 to Feb. 3, 2006
Meycauayan Branch	Rm. 104, Meycauayan, Bulacan	Jan. 26, 2006 to Feb. 10, 2006

After the said dates, all depositors can file their claims personally at the PDIC Claims Counter, 6th Floor, SSS-GSIS Bldg., Ayala Avenue corner V.A. Rufino St., Makati City from Monday to Friday, 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. or by mailing to:

The Manager
Claims Processing Department
Philippine Deposit Insurance Corporation
PDIC Makati Office
Makati City

3. Depositors are advised to present the following requirements to the PDIC representatives when filing their claims:
   a. Original evidence of deposit such as Savings Passbook, Certificate of Time Deposit, or Bank Statement including Unique Deposits
   b. Two (2) latest valid identification cards/documents (IDs) with depositor's signature

Other documents may be required by the PDIC representatives in the course of their processing of claims filed.

4. Pursuant to the provisions of R.A. 3591, as amended by R.A. 9302, the last day for filing claims for insured deposits in the closed Rural Bank of 21st Century (Balagtas), Inc., is on January 25, 2006. After January 25, 2006, no insured deposits shall be paid.

PHILIPPINE DEPOSIT INSURANCE CORPORATION

DepED

INVITATION TO BID

Item No.	Description	Delivery Period	Location
1	Supply and Delivery of Computer Laboratory Equipment	Within 30 days upon receipt of Purchase Order	Tagbilaran Central Elementary School, Tagbilaran City
2	Supply and Delivery of Computer Laboratory Equipment	Within 30 days upon receipt of Purchase Order	Bilar Central Elementary School, Bilar
3	Supply and Delivery of Computer Laboratory Equipment	Within 30 days upon receipt of Purchase Order	Maribojoc Central Elementary School, Maribojoc

NATIONAL FOOD AUTHORITY

SUBJECT : AMENDMENTS TO THE GENERAL GUIDELINES ON THE POST-SUBMISSION OF PERFORMANCE BONDS AND ON A PRIME SECTORS IN THE IMPORTATION OF RICE FOR CY 2006

FROM : THE ADMINISTRATOR

TO : ALL RICE-BASED FARMERS ORGANIZATIONS AND OTHER CONCERNED PERSONS/ENTITIES (LAND ENTITIES)

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

METRO

EZ2: 8 22 | SUERTRES: 2 4 5 | SIX DIGIT: 9 4 0 1 5 6

6/42 Luxon/Vis-Min: 5 12 19 20 23 37

P6,186,159.00

Blast rocks court building; cops on alert

By Margaux C. Ortiz

THE POLICE DECLARED A Metropolis alert Monday night as a blast rocked the Court of Appeals (CA) building on Ocean St., in Ermita, Manila, at around 9:30 p.m.

The heightened police vigilance, however, was prompted not by the explosion but by the discovery earlier in the day of hundreds materials in the bag of a Light Rail Transit Line-2 passenger, Manila Police District (MPD) director Chief Supt. Pedro Bulaong has downplayed the explosion in front of the CA, saying it was caused by a pillbox thrown by warring street gangs.

"It appears that the incident was caused by a gang war," Bulaong said yesterday, adding that his men are now tracing the whereabouts of the groups responsible for throwing the pillbox. Based on the report of the MPD Explosive Ordnance Disposal Section, the blast occurred after two groups of teenagers were seen arguing in front of the CA building. Pieces of black electrical tape with plastic wrapper and small nails, which could have been used for the homemade pillbox, the police added.

A group calling itself Tabak ng Taong Bayan at Kawal ng Pilipinas, however, has claimed responsibility for the incident.

In a text message sent to a TV network, the group made several demands, among them the resignation of President Macapagal-Arroyo before Feb. 25, and that all Armed Forces chief Gen. Generoso Senga, together with other military officials allegedly involved in the "Hello, Garci," controversy.

The CA is celebrating its 70th anniversary today, with the President as the guest of honor.

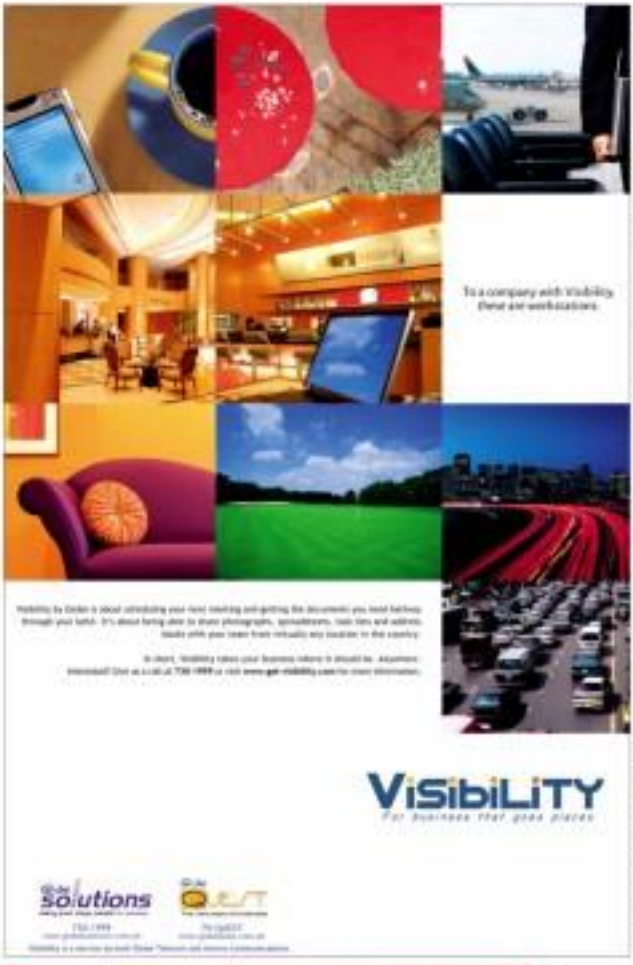
Meanwhile, the police said that Zaldy Ishmael Ampatuan, 34, who was caught with two dynamite sticks, the blasting caps and a lighter at the LRT Line-2 Santolan station on Monday afternoon, has no ties with terrorist groups or with forces who want to bring down the government.

"He look at Manila as an ordinary criminal offender. He will be charged with illegal possession of explosives," said Director Vidal Querol, chief of the National Capital Region Police Office (NCRPO).

"So far he has no records or ties to intelligence Group of the Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines," said Senior Supt. Felipe Rojas Jr., head of the NCRPO Intelligence Group.

Ilisanda, a construction worker, said the dynamite was intended for a Bolipanal project in Antipolo City. "I'm no terrorist," he told media. "I'm just an ordinary worker trying to earn a living."

With Lodge A. del Puerto and Edson C. Tandoc Jr.



Alleged kidnap ring leader nabbed at Naia

By Leila B. Salaverria

AGENTS OF THE BUREAU OF Immigration (BI) operations arrested an Indian man suspected of heading a kidnap-for-ransom group targeting other Indians in the Philippines as he attempted to leave the country.

The suspect, Balwant Singh, was arrested on Jan. 24 at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport as he was about to board a Singapore Airlines flight to Singapore en route to New Delhi, India.

Singh was carrying fraudulent travel papers that contained of a fake country permit and an exit clearance certificate, BI commissioner Alipio Fernandez Jr. said.

Fernandez added that, according to BI intelligence chief Fortunato Manalo, Singh had been summoned by the bureau several times before his arrest to answer allegations that he was involved in kidnapping activities and torturing several aliens.

Singh, however, did not bother to show up at the bureau's office.

BI intelligence agents have been trying to locate the suspect but failed because he allegedly kept on moving from one house to another.

Records said the kidnap syndicate chief Singh allegedly operated victimized other Indians in Rizal province and eastern Metro Manila, which is comprised of Marikina, Pasig, Mandaluyong cities and San Juan town.

He added that BI operatives were also looking for Singh's suspected accomplices.

According to the bureau, Singh could have connections with the group that abducted an Indian businessman in Makati last week.

Singh was arrested on the same day the police rescued the businessman in Cainta, Rizal.

One of the suspects the police caught during the operation was another Indian, who allegedly served as the group's spotter. Another suspect was killed when he shot it out with lawmen.

PNP pays tribute to NCRPO's finest

By Jocelyn R. Uy

THIRTEEN POLICEMEN WILL receive medals for a job well done when the National Capital Region Police Office (NCRPO) celebrates the 110th anniversary of the Philippine National Police (PNP) at Camp Bagong Diwa in Taguig City tomorrow.

Five policemen will receive the Sing. Gen. Urbano Pepe Sr. medal: PO3 Joel Bonilla of the Southern Police District; PO3 Rolito Custodio at the Eastern Police District; and PO2 Cesar Collado, PO2 Jun-Jun Jano and the late PO2 Jhon Perello of the Quezon City Police District.

Senior Insp. Dominador Ilarmo Jr. of the Manila Police District and the Northern Police District's PO2 Rolando Bojabo will be given the Col. Bobonimos Javier Award. Individual awards will be given to Senior Supt. Jose Gen. Oke, Supt. Ronald Estilles, Chief Insp. Alejandro Tampilling, SPO4 Pablo Solitarajos, PO2 Benny Francisco and Senior Insp. Teresita Lim for outstanding performance.

SPORTS

Editor Teddyboy S. Melendrez

RP athlete to be stripped of gold

SEA Games taekwondo champ Singson flunks drug test, says POC

By Marvin R. Castillo

THE LUSTER OF THE COUNTRY'S SHINING conquest in the 23rd Southeast Asian Games dimmed a bit yesterday after Filipino taekwondo winner Esther Marie Singson was found to have used performance-enhancing drugs. She would be stripped of her gold medal.

Philippine Olympic Committee secretary general Steven Hontiveros confirmed that Singson, who won the gold in the bantamweight division, was one of the athletes who failed the test.

Singson would not be reached for comment, but Hilda Alessandra, the athlete's godmother and guardian since her child hood days, said the University of Santo Tomas standout was shattered when she learned the news last Sunday. She said Singson still can't believe she flunked the dope test.

"We were shocked," said Alessandra, who has been taking care of Singson since the athlete's mother left for the United States, in Filipino. "She knows there's no way she would have flunked the test because just before the SEA Games, all of them were tested and she came out negative."

"That's the third time, they were all quarantined, so how could she have tested positive (for) a sudden?"

Hontiveros said Singson has been devastated since Sunday.

"She's been crying a lot and she cannot concentrate on her studies," Hontiveros said, adding that they are waiting for whatever the Philippine Taekwondo Association will do to set out the sanction.

Hontiveros and Dr. Raul Canlas, director of the Philippine Center for Sports Medicine, said the SEA Games Federation would come out with an official announcement soon.

Aside from Singson, **randomly** conducted out athletes during the hosted at Ilocos held from Nov. 27 to Dec. 3 last year. Gold medalists are all required to undergo doping tests also.

Although the drug test result will hardly make a dent on the Philippines' overall victory, it is expected to "cause embarrassment," said a POC official who declined to be named.

The Philippines won 113 gold medals, apart from 86 silvers and 96 bronzes, in ending the Games for the first time since 1977.

Singson, Jujoy Lizardo and Rolando Elano Alora, as well as Aileen Dionglena Mata Antonette Rivera, Donald Endes and Theodore Go **[illegible]** respective divisions.

Singson stands to lose the P100,000 in cash incentives the government had already given out to each of the 113 gold medalists.

The athlete also faces possible sanctions from the POC, the Philippine Sports Commission and the national taekwondo association.

Taekwondo gold medalists

ESTHER Singson

MARIA Rivera

KRISTINE Alora

DONALD Endes

THEODORE Go

JAPOY Lizardo

Open the Surprise!

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La Salle cage squad files leave of absence

By Jeannine W. Poyo

DE LA SALLE UNIVERSITY YESterday set in motion its plans to enforce its recruitment program by voluntarily pulling out of the UAAP men's basketball competition next season.

In a letter addressed to UAAP board presidents Fr. Max Bersabe, La Salle informed the league yesterday of its decision to take a one-year leave of absence from the senior cage tournament.

There was, however, a slight confusion on the interpretation of league rules regarding leave of absences. League rules state that a member school cannot avail itself of any of the collegiate sports basketball and volley ball.

In 1994, Adamson was suspended from all sports for a year after fielding Marlou Aquino in the men's basketball tournament despite academic deficiencies.

Also, despite La Salle's decision to skip one season, sources said that nothing is final since the "context of the letter will be deliberated upon along with the findings" of the eligibility case involving Archers Mark Romero and Tim Cone Sahalan.

UAAP representatives recommended eight tipped on La Salle's return, but the league's ban final ing committee recently unanimously that it would release its decision and recommendations by the end of the month.

In November last year, La Salle executive vice president Brother Ceferino Quiberquo already hinted of the university's plan to take a voluntary leave as part of its clean-up drive to the wake of an eligibility scandal that rocked

LA SALLE, 5.B

Bulls, Giants seek finals seats today

GAME EIGHT (Ahead to Game)
6:45p.m.—Ref Bol vs Purefoods
(Tied 3-3)—Red Bull vs Barangay Ginebra
Game 1—Ginebra Outlast, 103-100 (OT)
Purefoods Ace(7), 38-30
Game 2—Red Bull d. Ginebra, 92-81; Pure-foods d. Ace(7), 38-30
Game 3—Red Bull d. Ginebra, 92-81; Pure-foods d. Ace(7), 106-103

ON THE VERGE OF FINISHING OFF A fierce rival in the Star Mfg Coffee-PBA Finals Conference, Red Bull will meet early fame-hooked-with-a-little-pieces-of history that Barangay Ginebra is using to prop its hopes up.

It also has to handle the temporary loss of its import.

All the team wants hoping to run about a series scheduled for seven games, the Bulls saw fit to shoot with a little piece

Guiao: Ginebra has it worse

IN HUDDLE

Keith Cortes

YES SIGL Object James Penny was leery from our paraded for today's Game 3 of the PBA Ann Mig. Perea Cup semifinal tie—but, hey, consider Yeng, Guiao refuses to give up this game for lost.

"Basta ang alam ko, God sinasabi a great and honest effort and there's nothing we can do but play harder and smarter on Wednesday," said Yeng who believes that Ginebra is in a worse situation than Red Bull.

"Alam rather play without an import on Wednesday and be up 3-1, than play with an import and be down 1-3," Guiao said.

"Sus, wa ako ano eh! Satisfied with the thought that we earned our wins the hard and honest way," Yeng explained, prompting us to read deeply into some of his lines.

Anyway, some of my fellow-scribes strongly feel that the more win-an-assumption supporters following an election are less enthusiastic to vote for re-elected by the PBA commissioner's office.

"It has many loopholes," one scribe said. "What if something like this happens in Game 7 of the series? Our team will be severely handicapped, making the result of the match predictable."

Responding to him who have been scrutinizing Letty Coke's Rudy Hatfield has said a reported five-to-one duty comb Rudy Hatfield he is just as in the dark as we all are.

"My papers are all in order," said Hatfield. "You have anything more from him, but there has been none. Last I heard, he was enrolled in a distance course to complete his college curriculum in Michigan. But that aside, I was also told by his agent that he's in the Bahamas."

"Interesting how much he loves the game, I cannot comprehend why he isn't here yet," added Hatfield who worries about the clock ticking away for Rudy.

"He's not getting any younger, you know, Rudy was born Sept. 17, 1977, which means he'll be turning 29 this year's.

A source close to Rudy could be in a better position to know what's running inside the eagle's head — and Jason Hatfield Dad the eager's decision not to return — whether temporarily or permanently—should Rudy's sleep here.

"He wants to get away from somebody he's very much in love with but who unfortunately breaks his heart," the friend said. "He knows he will not be able to extend for it's here, that's why he might be staying away from her in order to."

Well, now Rudy knows that basketball is only Rudy's second love.

At the end of the Hotle Cup quarterfinals, Talk N Text's Asi Taulava and Jimmy Alapag were number one and two respectively in the 6,000 Fan Club with 6,000 points. In 2,000 Benito Rhodes , Purefoods's Kelly Nabong and his 2,1 Pirma Sabuduke, with one to Air.

Now that 2K7 is no longer in contention, PBA statistics head Fidel Villaganas said his picture has changed for sure, with either Mercado or Kelly bowling the pack. He will have to wait for all the votes at the end of the season.

Others currently in the running for Best Player of the Conference honors are Ginebra's Mark Caguioa, Purefoods' James Yap and Sunkist bigboy Red Bull's Enrico Villanueva and Air 21's Rainelle Ildefonso.

"Since the statistical point difference is very close between the candidates, as basketbalitya ito, eye-exploitation," said Fidel who concluded that the MVP only accounts for 10% of the total package.

###

Unlike the Araneta Coliseum audience, people who watched the Letterman's concert at the Ateneo Blue Gym got a special bonus.

They were serenaded by the country's three newest solo stars invited to the show as guest performers.

"We sang songs in German, Spanish, Italian, French and English," said BAP president Joey Lina, one of the three women. The other two are MBDA chief Raquel Fernando-and-Lim Angelo Reyes. "We also sang Xanwa's Many Splendored Thing with the Letterman."

Boy, that's one opportunity over the Letterman, who only sang English and beautiful Filipino songs while they had orchestral music years ago.

Then they have recorded this front we are saying. I wonder if the title will also pertain to the Zambales Concert which will be staged in many venues, among them the Manila Bowl, where Joey is president.

I, for one, will certainly want to hear the multilingual repertoire of our very distinguished delegates.

The Zambales, after 28 years, are coming back to Manila for a series of dishes in the Hard Rock Cafe in Makati, Makati on Feb. 10 , the Manila Bowl on Feb. 11, Araneta Coliseum, on Feb 12, and the Fiesta Center on February 14.

MIAMI'S Shaquille O'Neal goes for a dunk against the Clippers. AFP/EPE

Yao return fails to spur Rockets

MEMPHIS—YAO MING returned to the Houston lineup on Monday after a 21-game injury layoff, but the Rockets' were unable to snap out of their recent malaise, going down, 86-77, to the Memphis Grizzlies.

Yao had 13 points and eight rebounds in his return from a foot injury that required surgery, but the Rockets remained firmly grounded, losing their third straight and 11th in 14 games.

Chucky Atkins, who was hot go by the Pistols, Japtee Wheeler and picked up by the Grizzlies last week, hogged 19 points for Memphis, who evened last their third win in 10 games.

Pau Gasol added 18 points and 11 rebounds to the Memphis cause while Mike Miller added 17 points and Shane Battier 12.

Tracy McGrady had a game-high 21 points and 10 rebounds in the loss.

The Rockets got off to a flying start, leading 24-21, but trailed 43-39 at the intermission.

In Salt Lake City, Tim Duncan had 18 points and eight rebounds, guiding the San Antonio Spurs to a 94-70 victory over the Utah Jazz.

Tony Parker chipped in with 17 points while Bruce Bowen added 13 and Manu Ginobili 10, as the Spurs continued their domination over the Jazz notching their 10th win in 12 meetings and extending their win streak to four games.

Jarron Collins paced the Jazz with 15 points and 11 rebounds while Matt Harpring had 12 points and Andrei Kirilenko 10 in the loss as the Jazz slumped to their fifth defeat in six games.

In Charlotte, Jeffree Jones netted 16 points, adding six assists and six rebounds, as the Cleveland Cavaliers outscored the Bobcats, 103-91, ending its first stint in eight wins.

Donyeaun Ilgauskas added 15 points and Drueyell Marshall logged 14 for the Cavaliers.

STANDOUT HIGH NIGHT IN Atlanta GS San San 103, Mem 93; LA Hawk 94, Detroit 93; Charlotte 91, Memphis 86; Boston 77, Minnesota 94; Boston 86, San Orleans 98; Milwaukee 82, San Antonio 78; Utah 70, Portland 94; Seattle 119

NBA on TV Tonight in Salt Lake Spurs, 8:30 pm with replay at 11:30 p.m.; Boston vs. Sacramento (Sports Plus, 7 p.m.); Detroit vs. Ohio Arena (Sports Plus, 8:30 p.m.)

Petron beach volley features balanced field

FROM ASSISTING TEER RAMO MAY cross the court Michelle Laborte or Gerilla Tabarna.

With nine players bustling up the 16-team field, the opening leg of the Petron Ladies Beach Volleyball Tournament is expected to feature a more balanced competition for the non-celebrity-seasons.

Laborte and Tabarna of defending champion Philippine Navy are not yet entered in the 8th 3-and-6 leg of the tournament at the Clearwater Country Club in Cheddbol, Binangonan, making the two-day competition a wide-open race.

The Navy pair won the 2006 title, one of the rarely times and but a season from a top favorite was three division tiple PSC administrator Telka Miranda first organized the event three years ago.

They also experimented the concept in beach volleyball during the last 22nd Southeast Asian Games.

"We've always done our part to help develop beach volleyball here in the country," said Miranda in announcing's tenure of the PSA Petron as the main function room of the Pasalan Restaurant in Manila.

Together with Miranda in the monthly sport program sponsored by Petron and Manila Mayor Lito Atienza were the charming women of Sports supervisor Ella Alba Fausto and ACSAT vice president and athletic director Rebecca D. Dy.

Also appearing in the event complete in their Sports's enter were Philippine School of Business Administration (PSBA) players Jessica Tiola, Marielle Padlan, Shela Domingo and Jessy Barangal, Dr. Francis of dance's rookie pair of Ingrid Vivoco and Apollyn Mejica and veteran Diana Domingo of City College of Manila, who boldly declared that her team is eyeing nothing less than a semifinal slot.

A PHONE phone who hope to make an impact—after earning a good first impression—on the beach volleyball tournament are (from left) Sheila Marie Dumapias, Diana Rose Dimaya, Ingrid Vivoco, Jessy Domingo, Jessica Tiola, Marielle Padlan, and Apollyn Mejica. MIKE CAMPOS

Health dep't won't encroach on PSC functions

By Phan Anthony Reyes

THE PHILIPPINE SPORTS COMMISSION (PSC) AND the Department of Health (DOH) have finally reached a working compromise yesterday, leaving to rest the dispute caused by the issuance of the controversial Executive Order 441.

The DOH agreed that it will confine itself to the health-and-fitness of the national athletes, provide a voice for the PSC to submit meetings and refereeing a prickly implementing order whose draft called for a review of the PSC's policies and programs.

The DOH, instead, will act as an "oversight committee" to the PSC mandate on more than 1,000 athletes. The PSC, on the other hand, will form a separate group which, together with a counterpart group from the DOH, will make up a committee that will report directly to President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

"It's all done now and we are happy that this issue has been resolved," PSC chairman Ricardo Garcia told commissioners Ambrosio de Lunia and PSC lawyer to meet with DOH undersecretaries yesterday.

Kaunlaran told the confusion caused by the executive order signed July last year was heightened when the PSC saw the draft of the implementing rules authored by the DOH's monitoring group making the health department's review of the PSC's policies.

"That's were we ran into a block," said Kaunlaran. The PSC didn't realize the DOH quickly withdrew the draft.

De Lunia reported that the DOH—fluent to be the PSC's parent department. In a recent meeting's where Garcia was not present—they formulated guidelines.

De Lunia said the DOH won't meddle in the PSC's major functions such as grassroots sports development and dealing with the Philippine Olympic Committee and the national sports associations.

MORAL SUPPORT
Coastal Safety (second from left), a respected international countenance, arrived recently to meet with The First Philippine Hi Bowen Expedition team and to express his support for their historic conquest the world's highest peak. He also came to promote his book on his discovery of Bowen explorer Juan de Mahoy, who disappeared in 1524 while attempting a similar climb. With him are members of the HPMEE, (from left) Jaime Bellosillo, Erwin Emata and John Tuason.

P300,000 awaits pro-am winner; listing extended

THE PRO WINNER OF THE TEE TIME MCI. with the National Pro-Am will pocket P200,000 out of the total pot of P1.7 million poised for the tournament set for Feb. 7-11 at Riviera's Legaspi.

The winning amateurs will receive gift certificates from main presenter U-REC Corp. through its chair and CEO, Antonio Ben Rivera.

The winning deadline has been extended up to Feb. 3. The event is backed up by Gaisano's Restaurant, Pro Pride and 3-Star and supported by Toyota Motors Phils., Guam Corporation, Monaco Master Sports, BMR Tools Inc., WWB Express, Pure Gentleman Trousers, Adidas, SMC, Pagcor, Rexall, PSC, Epson, Nitro, Brothers, Casio, Olympus, Sportsbibles, Footprints, Rhinestone, PCI Bank, Land Bank, UCPB, BPI, Equitable Bank, Union Bank, ALCO, AMS Asia, Inc., Philkos Shipping, Iloilo Land Sales & Industrial Water Systems, Inc. through Mr. Gerry Gloria.

Toyota Motor Corp. will offer major sponsorship both one-year contract on Feb. 7 during the Celebrity Pro-Am and on the tournament proper Feb. 8-11.

The first 100 teams will have priority in the one-ball, Tournament format that requires players of a team to hit their ball after another.

The second-placed pro will gain P150,000.

Gabitan beats all comers, captures Poker King title

ANTHONY GABITAN OUTSMARTED ALL COMERS TO crown himself 2005 Poker King Challenge champion after a gruelling six-hour finale at the Harper Casino Filipino Pavilion last last night.

It was a fitting climax to 12 months of intense no-stop poker competitions that drew a total of 336 seeker in qualifying legs held in Metro Manila, Angeles, Tagaytay and Cebu.

Finishing second to Gabitan, who represented Metro Manila, was Cebu's Mike Tyler Pico Chang took third place, followed by Jason Lim, Roberto Daniel and Nicole Dela, in that order.

Eighteen players—the top three qualified from each of the six legs—met in the finale contested jointly by the Poker Club of the Philippines and Casino Filipino.

In addition to trophies and gift items and certificates from sponsors Bigtop, Jack Daniels, Ralph's Wines, Bicycle Playing Cards, 3M Post-it, Hotel and Casino, Canadian, Habitat and Golden, Tyler and Chang also received berths in the Philippine Poker Tour Million-Peso Holdem Championship on April 8.

SAPC downs St. James

DEFENDING CHAMPION DLSU defeated de Padua College (SAPC) defeated erstwhile leader St. James College of Malabon, 25-23, 22-25, 20-8, in the 11th Mlle Bird Women's Volleyball League at the Xavier School gymnasium Juan.

The DLSC spikers avenged their (3rd) victory in two matches as in the tournament organized by Mr. Roger's BEST Center and sponsored by Mlle.

School of St. Anthony, St. Scholastica's College and University of the Philippines have also joined three-set opener loss for similar 5-1 records.

Xavier rips UNO, sweeps elims

JOHN HOOKHAM CO-CAME AWAY WITH a season-high 53 points as Xavier School scored 80-1 Hi-Jack School, 122-14, to sweep the elimination round of the 2006 Metro Manila Thing Line Basketball Association Hinobe Cup tournament at the UNO gym in Manila.

Co, a 6-3 find from Bamboo City who is being eyed by UAAP team Ateneo, La Salle and the University of the Philippines, also finished with 16 rebounds.

"There other better motivation— Cardoz Tia, Philemon Sarmiento and Philip Ong,—also scored in double figures.

St. Jude Catholic School, with Carl Cruz finishing with 26 points and 27 rebounds, topped defending champion St. Stephen High, 85-81, to close out with a 4-1 record, just behind Chiang Kai Shek's 4-0-1.

SAN BEDA HOSTS CAGEFEST

Tangkad Sagad goes South

THE CHEERFUL TANGKAD SAGAD Basketball Tournament swings to the Metro Manila South zone when San Beda College hosts the second leg on Feb. 4-5 in Alabang.

Dr. Lo Aiko Lipa and Iman Pilot El. ementary School in Cavite lead the invitations which have signified their participation in the next leg of the 5-on-5 event for boys aged 12 and under together with Bail El, Cagayan El, Alabang El, Montessa El, Pilar Village El, Silverwoods El, South Cove School and Soldier Hills El.

The list includes San Antonio El, Laguna North Western College, Central San Pedro El, San Vicente El, Lourdes Mandaluyong, hosts San Beda-Alabang and DEMAS.

Chevifer product manager Tess Meneses, tournament director Edmundo "Ato" Badolato and organizer Bernard Ocampo were elated by the big turn-out and high quality of the games during the kickoff leg.

All teams will be given Chevifer playing jerseys.

Rising star Garcia tops student chessfest

SAN BEDA standout Jan Emmanuel Garcia emerged as champion in the under-11 student division of the RCCA chessfest held over the weekend at the Power Plaza Mall in Pasig City. Garcia, student of veteran coach Wendy Montano, scored a perfect score in the two-day tournament organized by the Asian Chess Center of Malaysia. Other winners in the student division were Robert Franz Gnath of Colegio de San Pascual Baylon, Bulacan, second place; Eugene de Patricio of San Sebastian College, third; and Joseph Tesquito of St. Ignatius Academy, fourth.

3-cocker on today

ANGELES – A cockfight is scheduled tonight at Elks Club, an unaffiliated Makati Cockpit arena with more than 50 fights lined up. The derby is sponsored by El Kilig Derby Aces and headed by Capt. Leo Kilig, a gaming who will be supported by MTJ Sports and Amusement Corp. Sixty-four fights were held Monday night in the MTJ Fresh derby and six entries shared the 5-hit. Together Again of Phyllis Ngo, Binghamton Pride of Pete Isaac, Powerline Land of Victor Galvez, Panaon Secret of Jun Pascual, Jasmin of E. B. Bautista and Be Mine. For reservation of cockfights, call 894-3648 and 894-4615.

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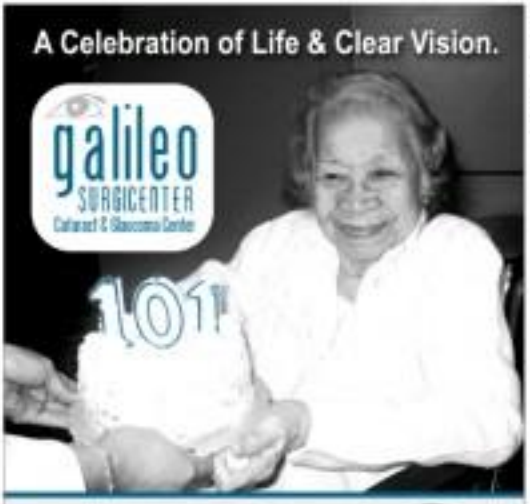

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PC BUYER'S GUIDE
The No.1 Computer Magazine in the Philippines

Peso nears 3-year high at 52.17 to $1

Lifted by favorable economic figures, expected IPO inflows

By Doris C. Dumlao

EXPECTED FOREIGN INflows into local stock offerings and easier credit-rating prospects for the country yesterday lifted the peso to 52.12 before closing at 52.17 to $1, its strongest finish in nearly three years.

Currency traders said foreigners intend to upcoming stock issuances of blue chip companies coupled with an improved fiscal outlook and the lack of corporate demand allowed the local currency to register a favorable momentum heading into the $1.51 level.

Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Amando Tetangco Jr. yesterday said that modest restraint was seen positive given the 6.1-percent economic expansion in the fourth quarter of 2005 on strong private consumption, beating the market consensus of 4.7 percent and third-quarter growth of 4.5 percent.

The peso's finish of 52.17 yesterday was its highest closing since trading at 52.11 to a dollar on May 15, 2003.

Jose Antonio Velasco, head of treasury and capital markets at HSBC Philippines, said crisp currency earlier this month drove many to buy dollars in advance such that sequester demand had lessened on Jan. 30.

He said strong inflows expected from equity issues—including from that of Metro Construction Corp.'s P6.5-billion initial public offering...were fueling the peso's strong rally and may allow the local economy to break into the 51.93 level very soon.

But he said the market was assuming some more positive developments—such as a perspective improvement in sovereign credit-rating outlook by London-based Fitch Ratings to "stable" from "negative" in the next few weeks...would allow the peso to remain trading in the 51 level.

"If there's a change in outlook by Fitch, it will be difficult for Standard & Poor's and Moody's not to adjust upward their currency outlook," Velasco said.

He said the two obstacles cited by Fitch when it first lowered the country's credit outlook were now resolved. The first was the

PESO, B4

WHAT'S INSIDE

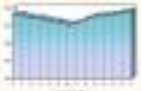
Equitable defensive block B4

Japan's NTT DoCoMo buys 7% of PLDT for $440M B2

Consumers less inclined to spend–survey B14

WB unit to raise $100M for SLEX B7

CURRENCIES



peso/$

P52.17 = $1

as of 5 p.m., Jan. 31, 2006

$1 = ¥117.18

as of 5 p.m., Jan. 31, 2006

GOLD: $556.20-$556.70

per ounce Hong Kong, Jan. 27, 2006

STOCK MARKET

PSE COMPOSITE INDEX

(See stock market report on Page B3)

Shares rise on improving outlook

(See Shares rise on Page B3)

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HYUNDAI

Japan's NTT DoCoMo buys 7% of PLDT for $440M

By Clarissa S. Batino

JAPAN'S LARGEST mobile player NTT DoCoMo yesterday signed a deal to buy the seven percent stake of Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. from its affiliate, NTT Communications Inc., for P22.05 billion (roughly $440 million or 52.1 billion yen), according to a PLDT statement.

"We are extremely pleased to welcome DoCoMo as a major shareholder in PLDT and an important partner of First Pacific," said PLDT chairman Manuel V. Pangilinan in a statement.

First Pacific, the Hong Kong-based conglomerate, is the biggest shareholder of PLDT with about 24 percent.

Confidence

"The entry of Ms. DoCoMo sows as a seal of vote of confidence not only for PLDT but for the Philippines as well," Pangilinan added.

NTT Communications Inc. will receive seven percent shares in the company's largest telco after it has agreed to sell 12.63 million shares, or half of its 13.98 percent PLDT holdings, to DoCoMo.

DoCoMo agreed to purchase the shares at a 20-day average of P1,820 apiece.

PLDT stocks closed at P1,810.5 each yesterday.

The acquisition will take effect once DoCoMo and PLDT majority owners in a memorandum obtain the necessary approvals.

Opportunity

PLDT said DoCoMo "may consider increasing its investment in PLDT, provided a suitable opportunity arises."

DoCoMo eventually will increase its stake to 10 percent of PLDT, sources said.

"The addition of DoCoMo as a strategic (anchor) will certainly enhance our ability to develop attractive 3G offerings for our market," said PLDT president Napoleon Nazareno.

DoCoMo will also host Smart Communications Inc., a wholly owned unit of PLDT, as offer its patented i-mode service.

I-mode is NTT DoCoMo's mobile Internet platform that offers users easy access to more than 100,000 Internet sites as well as services like e-mail, online shopping and banking.

Unmatched

"DoCoMo's experience in this [wireless] is unmatched," Nazareno said. "We are excited to introduce Lincoln to the Philippines to give our subscribers the most innovative services."

PLDT, DoCoMo, NTT Com and Pure Telink signed a cooperation agreement today, which will amend the existing contracts between the parties and reflect the new shareholding arrangements.

NTT DoCoMo is a subsidiary of Japan telephone operator NTT. The majority of NTT DoCoMo's shares are owned by NTT, and the majority of NTT's shares is owned by the Japanese government.

NTT Communications is NTT's overseas investment arm.

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Equitable defensive block

IT LOOKS LIKE THE GLOVES ARE really off between Equitable PCIBank and Banco de Oro.

According to the grapevine, a top Equitable PCIBank official has made preliminary inquiries with the Bangko Sentral if it would instead purchase off the controversial 10 percent in treasury shares that the previous owners, the Go family, used to keep themselves in power.

There is one hitch in the proposal, though. The new Equitable PCIBank board would be within the 10 percent block later next year, although apparently the Bangko Sentral and the Securities and Exchange Commission have yet to officially approve the retirement and the bank's resulting narrower shareholder base.

If it obtains regulatory approval to amend the retirement, Equitable PCIBank will most likely martion the 10-percent block alongside the 10-percent GSIS block.

According to the grapevine, not only would Equitable PCIBank obtain higher, market-based pricing for the 10 percent block if the auction, instead of involving a single large bidder, would also reduce insti-co-market losses, now that the bank share price is trading at the P64 level, instead of the sub-P60 range it was trading in the last quarter when the retirement was first taken.

Cocktales

Victor C. Aganon

More important, the alliance with the Government Service Insurance System—with the added 10 percent, GSIS president Winston Garcia's P82 per share asking price becomes reasonable—could potentially thwart off the Banco de Oro merger plans.

That, apparently, is the game plan.

Web of gambling

WHILE the Catholic bishops were busy fulminating against gambling, casinos, Garci and cutting, Internet-based gambling is slowly sweeping nationwide, courtesy of Philippine Trade Secretary Roberto Ongpin and his nephew, former Finance Undersecretary Eric Ongpin.

Now, with the proposed 10 percent buy-in of eFUN into Ongpin and Benito Philbrick, gambling—their preferred name is "gaming"—is poised to make it mainstream jump into each landline, cell phone and even through PLDT subsidiary SBC's cable TV network.

According to the grapevine, eFUN president Ray Espinosa wants a new push-button to boost earnings for PLDT's Internet-based subsidiary, and that gaming apparently is on top the only realistic available on the horizon.

Money-go-round

■ YESTERDAY today, Northwest will stop giving away free beers and start charging $5 per alcoholic drink served to economy class passengers to Asian and trans-Pacific routes.

■ LBCS Cashes "Unggoy" Antonio lost a blistery Regional Trial Court case he filed against his former partners and buddy Ramon Ariate of ATN Kita-Eng Capital.

Judge Ismael Sarbac upheld the validity of the joint venture that the two former partners had signed, but which is newly robustly-minded rescinded, in taking over The Professional Group.

Ariate was represented by Del Rosario Herbosaro Bagaoisan Bal Bahora law firm; Antonio, by Villanueva and Sagsagan.

Heard through the grapevine

NEWLY recycled single-latter magnate NBC president Wanda Lucero has quietly put his Pacific Plaza Towers unit at The Fort for sale. Asking price: P20 million, which is P2 million less than a similar unit also placed on the market by Banco de Oro.

(Email scuttlebutt@abs-cbn.com or cocktails_pilipinas@yahoo.com)

Consumers less inclined to spend, survey shows

By Dazon L. Lucas

FILIPINO CONSUMERS HAVE become less inclined to spend their excess cash and are less likely to save it due to lingering concerns about the economy and the country's political stability.

This was the finding of the latest SC Nielsen wave/Bulder survey on consumer confidence which the multinational research firm released yesterday.

In the survey, the Philippines' consumer confidence index declined "non-plausibly" to 83 points in November 2005 from the results of the last survey conducted in May 2005.

"Filipinos are now more conservative in terms of spending money," AC Nielsen managing director Benedicto Gil Jr. said in detailing. reveals he stressed that the results were "relatively unchanged" from the previous results "particularly in the areas of job prospects and personal finances."

The regular survey is used to gauge consumer sentiments and confidence in the future of different economies by examining spending and saving patterns.

More importantly, the survey revealed that consumer confidence in the country remained below the global average of 98 points during the period. Consumers in India and New Zealand were the most optimistic, garnering 132 and 123 points, respectively. Iranian and Romanian consumers were the most pessimistic with 61 and 69 points, respectively.

According to Gil, local consumer confidence took a hit mainly due to concerns about the Philippine economy, with an overwhelming 69 percent of respondents expressing their worry over it.

"Rising oil prices and the value-added tax are factors which contributed to this perception in the Philippines," Gil said.

Respondents in the Asian region also credited the economies of their countries as their main concern, specifically that, to dominate and Malaysian respondents.

Aside from the economy, local consumers were also reining in spending due to worries about the country's political stability, the survey found.

"The Philippines takes first place in terms of political instability concerns," Gil said. "This is because we're all aware how it will affect our lives. The confusion [of political troubles] is important if we want our country to move forward."

The local AC Nielsen chief said the strife have also crippling controversy, the Hyatt 10 standcongestion, and the ensuing attempt to impeach President Macapagal-Arroyo—all of which happened during the run-up to the survey—made politics one of the top concerns of Filipino consumers at 42 percent, versus an Asia Pacific median of only 18 percent.

Surprisingly, the survey also found that Filipino consumers have also become very conscious about saving their spare cash after all their stored-up living expenses are covered.

AC Nielsen said 88 percent of Filipinos indicated an "inclination to save"—the second highest in the region after the Taiwanese.

This contrasts sharply with official statistics which show that the country is having one of the lowest savings rates in the region with only 24 percent of the country's economic output being stashed in banks.

This divergence may be ex-

CONSUMERS »

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OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF THE PHILIPPINES

Lopez firm to put up $4-M gas pipeline

RP's top 2 banks post rise in profits

By Abigail L. Ho

LOPEZ-OWNED FIRST GAS Pipeline Corp. (FGPipeline) has entered into a non-binding memorandum of agreement with electronic firm United Neptune Electricals Inc. (Unelabeled to install and operate a $4-million pipeline that will transport natural gas to Unelabeled's facilities in San Bernardo, Batangas.

First Gas's prospectus for its initial public offering said that under the agreement, a three-kilometer gas distribution pipeline system would be installed by the end of the year.

The project was given an environmental compliance certificate last Aug. 1, 2005.

FGPipeline has already acquired the right of way, addressed the pipeline's technical requirements and removed relevant papers pertaining to the gas supply.

Goodbuy, the country's largest electrochemical plant, consumes more than 16 million liters and 3.5 million liters of bunker C and diesel fuel, respectively, for power and steam generation.

It produces components for the manufacturing of soaps, cosmetics, detergents, plastic materials and beverage, among others, and said it wanted to switch to natural gas for operational and environmental reasons.

In January 2005, RA 8997 granted First Gas Holdings Corp. (FGHC) a franchise to "construct, install, own, operate and maintain" pipeline systems for the transportation of natural gas throughout Luzon.

FGHC on Sept. 6, 2005 transferred the franchise to FGPipeline.

The franchise, which will expire on Feb. 15, 2026, requires its holder to start exercising any of the rights and privileges spelled out in the contract within five years from effectivity.

Failure to start work on any pipeline-related activities by Feb. 15 will mean revocation of the franchise.

"At present, the re-evaluation of the franchise on the basis of the expansion of the 50-year period, FG-Pipeline Inter-Island-Gas activities preparatory to the installation of a gas pipeline, such as taking temporary occupancy of affected properties and negotiating right-of-way agreements, are ongoing," the prospectus said.

RP's top 2 banks post rise in profits

THE COUNTRY'S two biggest banks—Bank of the Philippine Islands and Metropolitan Bank and Trust Co.—reported higher profits in 2005, compared to year-ago levels.

BPI reported a net profit of P11.3 billion in 2005, or 22 percent higher than the previous year's level. Metrobank, the country's largest commercial bank in terms of assets, posted an unaudited profit of P9.56 billion, up from P9.03 billion in 2004.

BPI said last year's consolidated profit had included the profit in the last four months of 2005 of recently acquired Prudential Bank.

Its return on equity improved to 14.7 percent from 12.6 percent, while return on assets went up to 1.7 percent from 1.6 percent.

"BPI's current online is reviewing all Philippine Financial Reporting Standards (PFRS) adjustments applicable to the net bank operations and to the Prudential Bank acquisition," the bank said in a statement to the exchange.

BPI's total revenues increased 23 percent from year-ago level, while net interest income expanded by 16 percent.

Its operating expenses in the same period rose by 26 percent. Total assets in 2005 stood at P528 billion, up by 12 percent from the 2004 level. Boris C. Bandao

Insurance agency plans to impose risk-based capitalization rule

By Dwin L. Luna

LIFE INSURANCE COMPANIES MAY soon have to have more capital to cover high-risk liabilities, even as the industry's sales continue to stagnate due to the weak economy.

Speaking before a group of life insurance executives, Insurance Commissioner Emerenciano E. Sarmiento said she would proceed with a proposal to impose the so-called "risk-based capital" approach to insurance firms this year.

"I want risk-based capital in place by mid-2006," she said yesterday at the Philippine Life Insurance Association (Plia) on Tuesday.

"I'm eager to meet the deadline, so submit your comments now," she added, taking many officials of the group by surprise.

While members are deeply divided over the plan which will require insurance firms with larger risk exposures to set aside or raise more capital to protect their stakeholders from adverse market movements.

Insurers could lose exposure to risk will be allowed to free up more of their capital for investments and other activities.

Smaller insurers complain that the plan unfairly favors large insurance firms which are better capitalized.

Sarmiento, who has been at the helm of the IC for just a little more than two months, was firm in her stance that the risk-based capital approach was the lens may forward for the industry, mimicking a gauntlet policy shift now being undertaken by the banking industry.

The IC chief's thrust toward higher capitalization came just as the licensing board of the industry announced confirmed the threats facing local life insurance firms.

In his speech, First Life president and CEO Peter Cayetano said new policies sold by life insurance firms had been declining by 5 percent a year, even as the country's population continued to grow by 1.6 million yearly.

"Introduced policies exceed new policies sold by an average of 120,000 a year, he said.

In addition, the total number of "in force" insurance policies are increasing by only 150,000 a year, even as 900,000 new policies are sold during the same time frame—a sign that lost and lost policyholders are able to maintain their periodic premiums.

Workers in the the insurance industry have supported with the number of agents having plummeted at 35,000 over the last five years.

"These twin threats that call our progress," Cayetano said. "The negative consequences of the decline in productivity can be disastrous not only for the life insurance industry but as much for every Filipino family."

NRMDC seen taking over 2 mining assets

By Christine A. Saylon

STATE-OWNED NATIONAL RESOURCES MINING Development Corp. (NRMDC) will acquire mining assets previously held by North Davao Mining Corp. and Benguet Gold Mines Inc.

The Privatization Management Office will transfer these mine sites, classified as abandoned, to NRMDC for development.

An official of NRMDC said in an interview that the agency might tap joint venture partners for the development of these mine sites.

About 30 foreign and local investors from agency had shown interest in developing these mine sites, which still have untapped mineral reserves, NRMDC president Artemio Dizon said in an interview.

Among those interested are Philippine Metals and Minerals Group Inc., Benguet Corp., Philex Bridge Exploration Corp., Atlas Consolidated Mining and Development Corp., Apex Mining Co. Inc., China Nonferrous Metals Mining Co., Toronto Ventures Inc., Lafayette Philippines and Intex Minerals.

NRMDC is seeking a joint venture partner for the exploration and development of the North Davao property. The NRMDC official said a bidding would be held soon for this.

The North Davao concession in Compostela Valley covers 40,000 hectares.

NCMC was formerly owned by the Elizalde family. It was later acquired by the government. Attempts by the Aquino Administration Peace to sell it failed. The Privatization Management Office took over the asset from the AFP.

The other mine site is that of Benguet Gold, which is in Baal, Kalinga Apayao. The covers 644 hectares.

UnionBank posts P2.76B in profit

UNION BANK OF THE PHILIPPINES POSTED a net income of P2.76 billion last year.

This was 23 percent higher than the previous year's P2.20 billion.

The bank's net income has been growing by a compounded annual rate of more than 28 percent in the past five years.

Return on average equity increased to 15.9 percent in 2005 from 14.2 percent in 2004, while return on average assets stood at 1.9 percent.

In a statement, the bank said improved profitability was achieved on top of a 20 percent increase in provisions for loan losses to P921 million from P769 million in 2004.

It said its capital markets businesses showed very strong revenue growth with both sectoral and trading gains growing by more than 50 percent. Consumer and small and medium enterprise finance also showed sound growth. Interest earnings from credit cards, auto loans, mortgage and Business Line (a loan product secured by customers' deposits or real property) accounted for more than one-third of the bank's lending income. Earnings from auto finance business went up by 19 percent year-on-year due to higher loan volume. The bank's volume of new auto finance bookings grew by 23 percent versus an industry sales growth of 10 percent during the comparable period.

Loyola gets license to sell securities

THE SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMmission has approved Loyola Plans Consolidated Inc. (LPCI) license to sell P1 billion worth of securities in 2006.

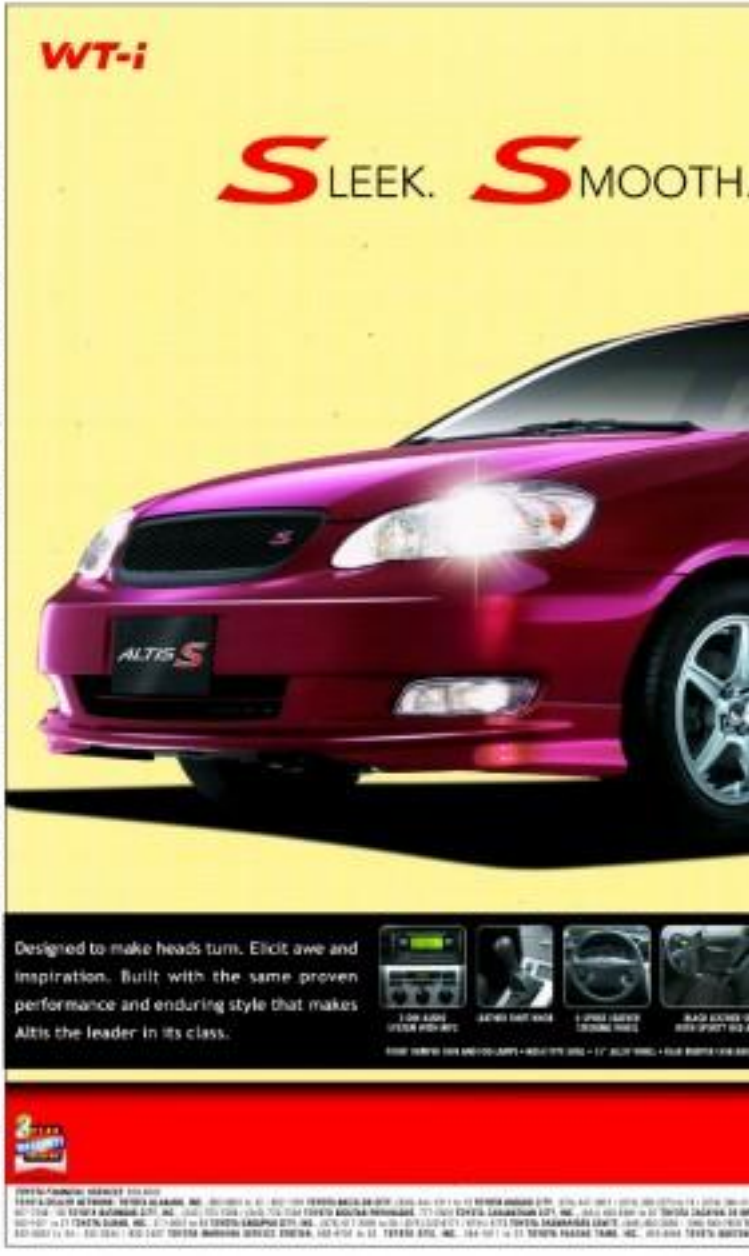
LPCI has complied and complied with all the requirements of the SEC for the granting of license and the authorization to deal with securities.

On Jan. 9, the SEC conferred to LPCI the certificate authorizing the company to act as dealer in "Pre-Need Fixed Value Education Plans, Life Plans and Pension Plans in the Philippines."

LPCI is one of the leaders in the pre-need industry, consistently landing in the top 5 in annual ranking.

LPCI will be selling its three products: Investment, education and memorial plans.

Loyola has 17 regional offices and 85 business centers nationwide.



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WB unit to raise $100M for SLEX

Malaysia's MTD to sign toll agreement with gov't this week

By Clarissa S. Balino

THE INTERNATIONAL FINANCE CORP., a unit of the World Bank, has said it will raise as much as $100 million in long-term funds for Malaysian firm MTD Manila Expressway to finance the rehabilitation of the South Luzon Expressway.

The Malaysian firm, a unit of MTD Capital, and the government have reduced the cost of the 36-kilometer highway upgrade to about P8.3 billion from an earlier costing of P11 billion.

MTD is the second largest toll operator in Malaysia.

IFC country manager Vipul Bhagat said the multilateral agency would lend up to $50 million in 10-year funds to the proponents of the fourth Luzon Expressway upgrade.

The World Bank unit, along with other banks, will then raise another $50 million for the $1bn project, said the IFC chief. The syndicated loan will have a maturity of seven to ten years.

Also, MTD Manila Expressway is scheduled to sign the Supplemental Toll Operation Agreement, or Stoa, with the Philippine National Construction Corp. and the Toll Regulatory Board this week.

"We are very keen on the SLEX upgrade," Bhagat said in an interview. "We are just waiting for the Stoa."

The Stoa, which specifies the toll fee and how it is computed, will serve as the contract among the PNCC, the toll board and the Malaysian group.

With the Stoa, MTD Manila Expressway may complete its financing for the project.

The SLEX upgrade is one of the major projects of the Arroyo administration. Investors are hoping that the upgraded roadway once completed, will facilitate the flow of goods to and from South Luzon.

The state-owned PNCC has the sole franchise to operate toll roads, but lack of funds had forced the PNCC to enter into agreements with private road developers.

Government sources said that the toll fee for each kilometer along the SLEX will be low or there those of other existing toll roads in the country.

"The board of directors of the PNCC took pains to ensure that the rehab of the SLEX would end the lowest per kilometer in terms of tollfee," a government source said.

The PNCC is currently charging 72 centavos a kilometer for cars and jeeps; P1.44 a kilometer for buses and small trucks and P2.16 a kilometer for trailers and 16-wheelers.

At the North Luzon Expressway, the Manila North Tollways Corp. charges a flat rate of P62 for cars and jeeps from Balintawak to Bocaue. Then along the 19-kilometer closed system, it collects another P2.49 a kilometer for light vehicles.

The Malaysian proponent of SLEX will have to provide 20 percent of the equity, pegged at P2.5 billion.

More than 160,000 motorists use the SLEX daily.

The highway spans about 50 kilometers from Alabang to Calamba. About 60 percent of Luzon's produce passes through the highway each day.

At the same time, the toll fee has to be viable enough for the Malaysian group to recover its investments and for creditors to lend to the project.

MTD Manila Expressway in July 2005 raised over some $2.5 million in the PNCC as proof of its financial capabilities.

The SLEX upgrade involves the rehabilitation of the Alabang viaduct (Toll Road 1) in Muntinlupa City. It also calls for the expansion of the stretch of Alabang to Sta. Rosa to eight lanes, the Sta. Rosa to Calamba to six lanes (Toll Road 2) and the widening of the Calamba to Sta. Tomas road to four lanes (Toll Road 3).

Pre-need sales dropped over 44% in 2005

Elizabeth L. Sanchez

THE SALE OF EDUCATION AND PENSION plans of pre-need firms fell 44.3 percent to P10.3 billion in 2005.

In a monthly sales report prepared by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), sales of education plans plummeted 56.62 percent to P5.75 billion from January to December 2005, from the P13.3 billion of the previous year.

Pension plans also slipped 41.4 percent during the same period to P11 billion from P19 billion in 2004.

Life plans dipped 18.2 percent to P3.8 billion from P4.2 billion in 2004.

For the month of December alone, total sales dropped 14.3 percent to P1.64 billion, that is exacerbated by 11 percent against November's P1.48 billion.

Education plans were still the hardest hit in December as sales tumbled 16 percent to P597 million.

Pension plans however started to recover as it posted an 8.3 percent increase to almost P1.1 billion.

Life plans also continued to improve 1.6 percent in December to P354.6 million.

The pre-need industry is reeling from the financial difficulties of major firms that sought court rehabilitation.

Peso . . . From page B1

delay in the implementation of the expanded value-added tax and the second, the political uncertainties that were affecting the economic program.

"Things have now changed for the better," he said.

After repealing certain exemptions from the VAT, the government will implement starting today a crucial increase in the VAT rate from 10 to 12 percent. The VAT reform package is the single biggest fiscal measure announced to reinforce the government's fiscal position.

Should there be an improvement in the country's credit rating outlook, Tolosa predicted that the peso would immediately test $1.570 dollar, slowly appreciate toward $1.55-$1.550 to a dollar.

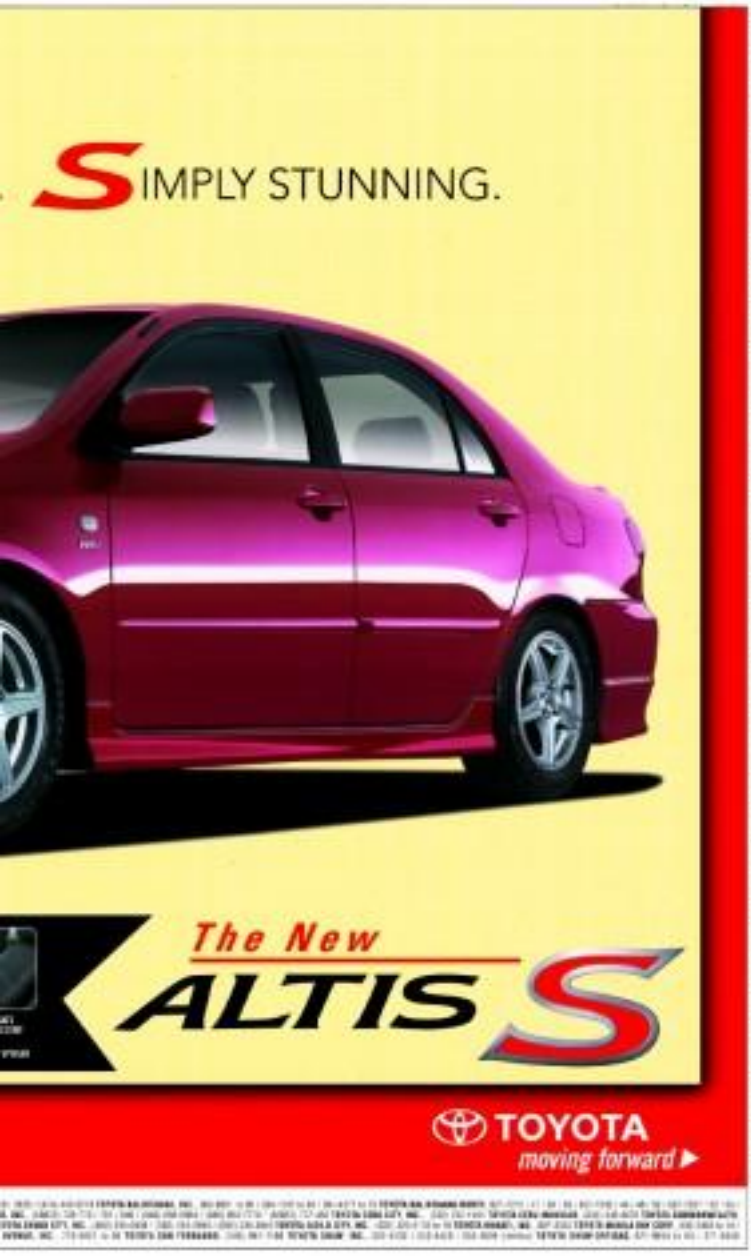
"And after the first quarter and if the expected revenues from the VAT are met, we're going to see the peso at the $1.6 mark," Tolosa said.

Aside from Fitch, other equity raters in the pipeline include those of broadcast giant GMA Network, mining firm Lamsons Copper Corp. and food manufacturer Universal Robina Corp.

Consumers . . . From page B6

planned by the profile of the survey's respondents, which are mainly middle- and upper-income bracket Filipinos with access to the Internet—presumably people that have higher disposable incomes and a higher purchasing power.

More than 23,000 consumers were polled over the Internet covering 41 countries in November 2005. In the Philippines, about 500 respondents were surveyed, AC Nielsen said.



MOTORING

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Edsir Cesar D. Manzanares

Relentless Toyota unveils latest RAV4

By Charles E. Bahan

JUST WHEN A LOT OF PEOPLE expect Toyota Motor Philippines (TMP) to ease up just a bit, the company unveiled last week its latest sport utility vehicle model, the new RAV4. For the fourth time the company topped the local vehicle sales chart (passenger car, commercial vehicle and overall sales count). It was ranked No. 1 in the JD Power Customer Satisfaction Index (a measure of the level of satisfaction among owners of a particular brand and not any particular product).

TMP said the new RAV4 has been completely reengineered for 2006 to project a more prestigious image by positioning it somewhere between a passenger car and a sport utility vehicle. The package thus will cater to city-driving needs and features not yet found in other vehicles in its class.

"The new RAV4 hits the road like you've never experienced before," said Toyota Motor Philippines president Atsushi Nakata.

The RAV4, first launched in 1996, was the first compact SUV to be introduced in the country. Its last major upgrade was in 2003.

THE NEW RAV4: compact yet powerful

Further strengthening

Toyota said the latest RAV4 is set to further strengthen TMP's position in the commercial vehicle segment, witnessing its lineup which now includes the luxurious multipurpose vehicle, 1-ton pickup, 10-ton utility van, Porsche minibuses, and the Hiace Commuter and Prado SUVs.

Bigger than its predecessor, the new RAV4's bigger exterior dimensions (4600 mm long, 1805 mm wide and stands 1730 mm tall) not only makes it comparable to vehicles a notch above its class but it can now offer a much comfortable seating space and a much more storage space in the back.

The new RAV4 is readily identified by its impressive "burning eye" projector design for the headlamps, a trendy and distinct radiator grille, a raised triangular set of front fog lamps, six-spoke, 17-inch aluminum wheels, oversized outer mirrors with black accent, a much brighter lights-running diode (LED) rear combination lamps and rear spoiler that incorporates to enhance the SUV's aerodynamics.

The new RAV4, available in either four-wheel drive and two-wheel drive variant, is powered by a newly adopted 2.4-liter VVTi engine (which produces a maximum output of 170 hp/6,000 rpm and maximum torque of 224 Nm/4,000 rpm) and mated to a highly responsive and fuel efficient 4-speed automatic super ECT gearbox.

Improvements

Improvements in the RAV4's interior design are highlighted by the original double wing-shaped instrument panel, highly ridden optitron meters, use of luxurious genuine leather and metallic panels, borrowing shaped door trims, and enlarged knee pad for the steering wheel.

The new RAV4's high performance air-conditioning system is equipped with independent driver and front passenger side controls and an automatic switch, and a pollen removal mode scanned dust while blower recirculation.

Like most European models, the new RAV4 now has a steering wheel audio switch all for easier manipulation of the entertainment system while driving.

The rear seats tilt down to a 60-40 split ratio one-touch lever resulting to a 1470 mm long deck space and the deck floor storage area includes a 90-liter storage box for small or-save items, and a retractable two-piece double folding deck board.

The RAV4's new platform minimizes deformation in the cabin area upon impact and even employs the Head Impact Protection system on the ceiling that helps protect occupant's head. Front passengers are further protected through a combination of dual stage driver and front passenger, side and curtain SRS airbags usually found in higher-end EL-Vs.

The Grim Reaper visits the NLEX

THE GRIM REAPER VISITED the North Luzon Expressway (NLEX) last Wednesday, taking three lives and injuring 21 persons in three separate accidents during a heavy downpour at around 2 p.m. Newspapers reported that the mishaps, involving a total of 16 motor vehicles, took place between the Pulilan and the Apalit-Sasmuan exits and at nearby Bilusukin 40.

However, the public may have become so accustomed to the numbers of road accidents, no matter how many are killed or seriously injured, because of the sheer frequency of these tragic events in our country. Motoring accidents have lost their shock value. People sit up and take notice only when someone famous or a friend or member or friend is involved.

To most of us, road safety is a boring topic, something to pay only lip service to...until we ourselves are personally affected. Then, we are quick to blame the accident on others or external factors like a slippery road or bad weather.

Multiple

Take, for example, the multiple collisions on the NLEX last Wednesday. While Manila Hotel Subway Corp. (MHTC), the operator of the NLEX, was still investigating, in news circles some bloggers quoted unidentified motorists as saying that the accidents would not have happened if the MHTC had dispatched patrol teams to monitor traffic and put up warning signs.

The MHTC should enforce these precautionary measures every time there is an incident or calibration so motorists are aware because of wrong cues, they said. Also, that it is the duty of MHTC to ensure road safety because it solicited "excellence" in the bid for franchise. (The toll for the entire 83-km stretch from Balintawak to Sta. Ines, Pampanga or vice-versa is P100.)

Inadequate toll rates or not, people who say such things are obviously unaware that the MHTC has divided the NLEX into three sections to each of which three patrol groups are dispatched. In a telephone interview, MHTC president Jose de la Arena claimed that 16 patrol vehicles are "proportioned" at Sta. Rita, San Fernando and San and that each section of the NLEX is patrolled 24/7 to keep motorists informed the weather conditions.

Patrol

Aside from MHTC's round-the-clock patrols, emergency medevac towing service and emergency medical service are provided by Automobile Association Philippines (AAP) and Lifeline Services, respectively.

As for watching signs, Dr. Jose told that MHTC has for the 66 Message Signs (VMS) at exit areas to the NLEX which are lighted up electronically anywhere incidents of slippery or bad road conditions whatever necessary. It is possible, however, that in non-visibility such as that dark, rainy Wednesday many motorists may not notice to heed the VMS.

Dr. Jose denied allegations that some low-lying portions of the NLEX were flooded. The toll-way is designed to efficiently channel water into the drainage system. He revealed that before rebuilding the NLEX (at a cost of P18 billion), MHTC hired three Netherlands of the UK to conduct a safety audit of the old expressway. Additional designs for drains and those defects were eliminated.

Slippery

Dr. Jose said that while there were no flash floods, a film of water on the surface of the roadway made the road slippery. Motorists that run fast and/or tailgate, there inevitably occur, are prone to hydroplaning and colliding on wet roads, he pointed out.

In fact, on page 26 of the March Luzon Expressway Motorist's Handbook, it is stated that maximum two-second gap between a vehicle and the one in front on roads carrying fast traffic, the gap should be at least doubled on wet roads. Pages 36 and 37 of the handbook give typical stopping distances at speeds ranging from 20 to 100 kph.

This year, MHTC printed 14,000 copies of the motorist's handbook and gave them away to motorists using the NLEX. A second edition is hoping to being printed but that more copies will be sold at a nominal price.

Leaflets on safe driving and the motorist's handbook show that MHTC believes driver education is needed for road safety. But Dr. Jose admitted that it is impossible to find time to do that since the driver are not traveled," he concluded.

* * *

E-mail comments to carroll-h@inquirer.com.ph.

Hearing noises

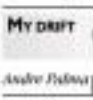
PEOPLE INTERACT WITH THE physical world through their senses. Significant experiences are filed away in our memories and those seem to be referenced using the various sensational registries. This is probably why we tend to remember moments by the sensory input that is most unique or dominant. If we couple this with our memory, this allows human beings to practically replay entire episodes of our lives in a manner more actual than virtual.

The realization of this "sense and memory" correlation came at a very early age. I used to spend many childhood hours inside with my maternal grandparents in their quaint home on Sto. Cristo. While I remember being spoiled mostly rotten, I did take home quite a few useful skills from those times. For example, I learned to crack open a nice a frying pan, learning the four-move checkerers, and the ability to identify cars by the sounds they made.

When it neared the time I would be bored, my grandfather noticed that I would inevitably rush to the gate at the sound of random passing automobiles. Seeing that this was my way for the grandson of a former auto mechanic to display complete ignorance about cars, he would point out those cars also starting for my mother to pick me up would be spent in a more constructive manner.

Guessing game

We sat atop the steep concrete flight of stairs that lead to their home so that our view of the narrow street below was unobstructed. As I sat facing away from the street, my grandfather then began to identify cars as they passed by after a few cues, it would be my turn to guess, only having allowed to



Andre Palma

gaze at the street in confirm whether I was correct.

This went on for quite some time—even the span of many afternoons—but in the end I could identify the slightly smoother, shriller sound of my mom's diesel Isuzu tricycle from the din of the jeepneys. Call me destined for a life obsessed with the automobile or many a shrink will point to this childhood experience as "formative" and sexually quite damning.

From those afternoons listening to the harmonies of traffic, I developed a strange sensitivity to the sounds of cars. Listening to music with my automobile ears I can identify the make and model of a car by the sound of its engine. And it is not that I am more talented than all the many cars I've driven in my lifetime? It is very difficult to accurately convey little sonic detail, but my job is made easier because the only moving stuff sounds out.

Pleasure hum

If a car's exhaust note developed a pleasant hum, then how does it compare to what are some of the most beautiful sounds in this world. Is it as tough and manly as the rhythmic hum of a steel, turbo boxer four or idle? Does it purr with the silky, feline smoothness of a fuel injected 501 Maybe it evokes the fleshy song of an inline-6 willingly charging away from the liquid speed limit.

Is it at all be angry as the super-sedans, luxury-mobiles and high-strung, 9,000-rpm exotic sable cubes should fuse cylinder? Is it as dramatic as the smart and consumptive of a five-branch, bass-fed turbo with attitude? These are all comparisons made with regularity by engine nerds that have left an indelible mark on my subconscious, namely with the distinctive, striking sounds they produce.

Mundane sounds

Outside of the remarkable exhaust notes, there are hundreds of every day mundane sounds that one becomes fatal, in with, both consciously and unconsciously, in the course of being around automobiles. Whether in the cars, after-the crash of a working starter as it helps crank the engine.

There is also the crisp, snap and click engagement of a well served, short throw manual gearbox. Another is the low, mechanical whine of transmission that comes with each gear-rotation are-link brake systems (ABS). The annoying squeak of all too used wiper blades. Can there be a more common sound than the rattling vibration of a timing belt way past its due date? Then there is the grating, high-pitched screech of worn apart, brake pads...much like a thousand pieces of chalk on so many badly finished black-boards.

If you really think about it, there is beauty in be environment when we take our senses to our automobiles. Listening is only a single way to appreciate the intrinsic substance of cars, but perhaps it is one unusually will only serve to give us a fuller, more meaningful automotive experience. Afraid that what you'll discover is different from everyone else? There is no right or wrong way to interpret what spiritually—and literally—moves us. Your opinion is as good as mine.

* * *

QUOTE ME. Hyperactivity is caused mainly by stress so, don't stress yourself. Always stop calm while driving.

Mitsubishi, Toyota establish a record

A RECORD OF SORTS HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED last week when two automotive giants not only in the country but also all around the world unveiled their new models on the same day before an enthusiastic crowd composed mainly of the country's motorist-investing journalists.

Mitsubishi has rolled out the all-new Galant, which will serve chiefly as an effort against Toyota's Camry and Honda's Accord. The three models are always regarded neck-and-neck in the luxury category, but with the new Galant, I believe Toyota and Honda should appear uneasy at the new challenge posed by Mitsubishi.

Before the arrival of the new Galant, the Accord has enjoyed relative sombers, what with its entire last year as the Car of the Year by the Cory group of Asia (wells-Mondoza, Manny Jobo Reyes and Teresita Sy-Coson) editors.

However, Toyota has remained undaunted as its Camry continued its strong performance, a feat that helped remember a fourth straight Triple Crown in 2005 by Toyota Motor Philippines.

One guy that came to mind with the new model brandished by Mitsubishi was Sergio Talusa, the Mitsubishi president, in a conversation with Talusa that I had written here a while back. Talusa said he credits the Galant as his virtual passport to a job at the Mitsubishi Motors of Japan right out of college.

"Even when I was still in college, I was already in love with the Galant," said Talusa. "Galant was the reason I applied for a job at Mitsubishi in Frankfurt."

Just for that, I would imagine the new Galant could be a real looker—inside and out.

* * *

From the seamless Galant launch, my colleagues had barely enough time to end off their boob when it was time again to attend a car launch in the evening—the unveiling of the new Toyota RAV4 and Glide.

Like in the Galant launch, everybody was awed by the new RAV4, which is nearly two feet longer than the previous model.

Almost everybody agreed that the new RAV4 looked thoroughly masculine—like a thoroughbred, if you ask me—and it was the kind that clothes horses would give directional tomorrow's compact SUVs.

It looks sturdy, its external features appearing like a Hollywood hunk if you're talking of an actor out to cause the role of a muscular gladiator a la Russell Crowe.

Easily, the new RAV4 overshadowed the Altis-X—the S being for the "sporty" one" of the new model.

FULL TANK

Al Mendoza

The night highlighted by Danny "the joker" who's double-tongued (or would "It's getting better all the time!" theme, took a sentimental dimension since it also served as a farewell for Nobuharu Tahara, the outgoing TMP president.

In his speech, Sonny Boaweres, TMP's senior VP for marketing, gave credit to Tahara's brilliant leadership as he acknowledged Tahara's exemplary feat of making Toyota Triple Crown winner four years in a row in his four years of stay here.

Tahara, well-loved by the media, was misty-eyed when he came down from the stage after reading his last farewell, which was hardly applauded by a huge throng that included his successor, Shinichi Ito, and TMP exe chair, the always-dapper Alfred Ty.

Sayonara, Tahara-san. You will be missed.

* * *

I salute the opening recently of Isuzu Quezon Avenue, which is one of four Isuzu dealerships owned and operated by Industrial and Transport Equipment Inc. (Isuzu).

This is another proof of Isuzu's continuing success in the country. It is no secret that Isuzu has been the leader in diesel engine technology in the country for years now. The Isuzu turbo or Quezon Avenue is owned by the same group that manages Isuzu dealerships in Pangasinan, Pampanga and Cebu. The key word in Isuzu's conduct of business is, as Tiu-ay Isuzu puts it, "Personalized." Whether sales or after-sales, Tiumay and all services rendered are specifically tailored to the individual customer's requirements.

Cheers to Isuzu, whose new driver, indeed, is another knockout like our previous national queen here, Shamy Pasquino.

* * *

QUOTE ME. Hyperactivity is caused mainly by stress so, don't stress yourself. Always stop calm while driving.

A VENEZUELA state-run oil company pumping "donkey" is seen as the sight falls over the eastern shore of Maracaibo Lake in Las Salinas. OPEC is unlikely to cut production when ministers gather Thursday in Vienna to decide on oil policy, analysts and petroleum's cash in worries over supply disruptions from Nigeria and possibly Iran hang over the meeting. AP

Crude oil prices edge up on tensions over Iran

Opec seen keeping production output steady

SINGAPORE—CRUDE OIL PRICES rose slightly Tuesday as nagging worries over Iran's nuclear standoff with the international community overshadowed expectations that Opec will keep its output steady at the oil cartel's meeting later in the day.

Light, sweet crude for March delivery on the New York Mercantile Exchange rose 12 cents to $68.49 a barrel in Asian electronic trading.

The contract on Thursday gained 219 cents to settle at $68.37 a barrel.

March Brent crude futures on London's ICE Futures exchange rose 12 cents to $66.71 a barrel.

Heating oil fell 0.11 cent to $1.8605 a gallon ($4 litres) while gasoline lost 0.14 cent to $1.7705 a gallon.

Traders are watching the meeting of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting countries in Vienna Thursday and the International Atomic Energy Agency on Thursday for price direction, analysts said.

Saudi Arabia's influential oil minister Ali Naimi, said Monday that Opec's position was "still to agreement" about keeping output steady at current levels.

The U.S., Britain, France, China and Russia agreed Tuesday that Iran should be hauled before the UN Security Council, which can levy sanctions or permanent members, over its disputed nuclear program.

After a private four-hour meeting, the countries issued a joint statement calling on the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN nuclear watchdog, to report the Iran case when it meets in Vienna on Thursday. The UN Security Council could impose sanctions or take other harsher action against Iran, OPEC's second-largest producer.

"Despite the efforts to avert a crisis the markets remain concentrated that an unlikely war on Iran's nuclear sites (but worst affect the price of oil," Phil Flynn of Alaron Trading Corp. said in a research note.

Traders also eyed developments in Nigeria, where rebels continue to threaten oil infrastructure. On Monday Iran foreign oil workers who had been held hostage for two weeks were released after a government leader appointed to their capture, who had demanded southern Nigerian South Yoruba from their region's energy wealth.

Nigeria a driver's leading oil exporter and the fifth-biggest source of U.S. oil imports. AP

GOODBYE GREENSPAN

US Fed expected to raise key rates

WASHINGTON—FEDERAL RESERVE officials, meeting one last time under Alan Greenspan's guiding hand, were expected on Tuesday to raise U.S. interest rates for a 14th straight time, while signaling uncertainty about the future.

Rather than last rate rise on Dec. 13, policy-makers said higher borrowing costs would "likely" be needed and analysts are united in the view the Fed will push up overnight rates another quarter percentage point to 4.5 percent.

Economists, however, look for a shift in tone to the Fed's description of the rate outlook to suggest an increase in the near meeting in late March is not a done deal.

Many Fed watchers think the central bank will drop "likely" and similar key rates into "may" be needed.

Others think the Fed may drop the guidance it has been offering since it began its campaign to ratchet up in June 2004 and say simply that incoming data will drive its decisions.

The meeting may or may not mark the end of a 19 month long rate rise campaign, but it will without question mark the end of Greenspan's 18 1/2 years in office.

The US treasury is expected to confirm former Fed Governor Ben Bernanke as the next chairman with a vote at some point during the day, clearing him to take office on Wednesday.

"Our guess is that Greenspan will try to leave his successor with as clean a slate as possible, both in terms of policy backwards and in terms of implied policy guidance," Lou Crandall of Wrightson ICAP wrote in an emailed note to clients.

When the Fed began to push up the overnight federal funds rate 1.9 months ago, it stood at a 1998 low of 1 percent.

The benchmark rate is now at 4.25 percent, close to a level many economists say neither spurs nor weighs on economic activity.

"The very pace of the tightening cycle is bound to ease and so you're at the point where more judgment is required," said Chris Johnson, chief economist at Comerica Bank in Detroit.

In his own markets, where bets are placed on the direction of interest rates, investors are about an 80 percent chance of another quarter-point tightening at the Fed's next meeting on March 28, the first gathering at which Bernanke will take the helm.

But the economic consensus rests on far from clear, and Fed officials are expected to stress that they will make their decisions based on incoming economic information.

The US economy expanded at a meager 1.1 percent rate in the fourth quarter of last year, but inflation aside from volatile food and energy prices was running a bit faster than Fed policy-makers would like.

However, as unfilled new prices edged up just 0.1 percent in December and have gained only 1.9 percent over the past 12 months, just within the Fed's perceived comfort zone.

While many economists expect the economy to rebound sharply this quarter from its surprisingly sluggish pace in the end of 2005, some expect a softening housing market to eventually take the sting out of the expansion's sails.

Merrill Lynch chief economist David Rosenberg points to declining prices for new homes as foreshadowing the weakening that may be ahead. Reuters

Tracing Alan Greenspan's career

GREENSPAN

WASHINGTON—A CHRONOLOGY OF Alan Greenspan, who was to meet his last meeting of the Federal Reserve Tuesday after more than 18 years as chairman:

- 1926: Born on March 6 in New York.
- In the 1940s, attends the Juilliard music school but gives up a career as a big band saxophone player to study economics at New York University.
- 1954: Forms Townsend-Greenspan, an economic consultancy, with a business partner in New York.
- 1974: After previously acting as economic adviser to presidential candidate Richard Nixon, is appointed chairman of President Nixon's Council of Economic Advisers. Continues under Gerald Ford when Nixon resigns in disgrace.
- 1977-1987: Back at Townsend-Greenspan.
- June 1987: Nominated by President Ronald Reagan as Federal Reserve chairman, to succeed Paul Volcker. Takes office in August, after Senate confirmation.
- October 1987: Stock markets crashes on "Black Monday", investment's cool handling of the crisis earns the new Fed chairman profound respect.
- 1991: President George Bush appoints Greenspan to a second term, but fails to blames him for contributing to his re-election defeat to Bill Clinton after the Fed refused to lower interest rates.
- 1996: Clinton appoints Greenspan to a third term, in December, the Fed chairman issues his now-famous warning of "irrational exuberance" in the stock market. But after a slight pause, share prices continue to surge.
- 1997: Marries long-time partner Andrea Mitchell, an NBC news correspondent, his earlier marriage in 1952 was short-lived.
- September 1998: Greenspan organizes a bailout of Long Term Capital Management for fear of global market panic if the huge hedge fund is left to collapse.
- 2000: Clinton appoints Greenspan to a fourth term. The term's plan rubbish is marked by the September 11 airborne attacks, the Fed starts driving rates to historic lows in response to the first US recession in 10 years.
- 2004: Appointed by President George W Bush to serve for an unprecedented fifth term as Fed chairman. AFP

Japan jobless rate fell in Dec.

TOKYO—JAPAN'S LABOR MARKET IMproved in December as the jobless rate fell to a lower than-expected 4.4 percent, helping to boost household spending and boosting expectations of firm economic growth ahead.

The jobless rate was down from 4.6 percent a month earlier and below a consensus forecast of 4.5 percent.

That was still above a seven-year low of 4.4 percent reached in June and September, but officials and economists have said the slight rise in recent months was the result of workers seeking better jobs amid increasing business confidence.

The jobs-to-applicants ratio for December rose to 1.00 from 0.99, meaning 100 jobs were available for every 100 applicants, the first time it had reached the even level since September 1992.

"The unemployment figure shows that the period of modest economic recovery that we have in the middle of last year is ending, and that the number of people who are finding work is starting to pick up," said Naoki Iizuka, chief economist at Daiwa Institute Research Limited.

"At this rate, we could see the unemployment rate fall to the mid-3 percent range by the end of the upcoming financial year ...

A dip into the 3 percent region could have an upward impact on consumer prices," he said.

Seiji Adachi, a senior economist at Deutsche Securities, said that in addition to the fall in the unemployment rate, the quality of jobs on offer appeared to be improving.

"Full-time jobs are now on the rise, whereas a little while back it was just part-time and contract workers," he said.

"With the labour market improving, household spending figures are looking good too. With both economic and external factors positive, October–December GDP (gross domestic product) figures could be very strong," he added.

Separate government figures on Tuesday showed that spending by salaried workers' households in December rose 3.2 percent from a year earlier and gained a seasonally adjusted 0.4 percent from November.

GDP expanded at a real 1.8 percent in annualized terms in the July-September quarter. The government expects the economy to grow 2.7 percent in the current fiscal year to March 31 and 1.9 percent in fiscal 2006-07.

Japan's economy has been gradually recovering at the last few years after more than a decade of stop-and-go growth. Reuters

Asia shares, gold climb

SINGAPORE—ASIAN STOCK MARKETS touched to multi-year highs on Monday, buoyed by regional economic optimism and strong Japanese company results, while thin dollar Euro investors and worries about high oil prices pushed gold to a 25-year peak.

London opened factors were adding the FTSE 100 index 7-'28 points up, and the dollar was mostly ahead of an expected US interest rate hike later in the day.

Crude oil held above $68 a barrel as Opec oil ministers gathered for a meeting in Vienna, and ahead of an near-price meeting of the Group's finance ministers scrambling to discuss Iran's controversial energy programme.

Technology stocks were strong around Asia and the Nikkei advanced to a 5-½ year high, closing up 0.6 percent for a sixth straight day of gains as Japan's earnings season reached a peak.

Global markets, including Japan, are now on a rising trend after some severe falls, and there's increasing confidence that gains (in local shares) will continue," said Kim Eng-Tek, chief investment officer at Citibank Investment Management in Seoul.

HSBC's index of non-Japan Asian shares hit a record, and stood 0.1 percent higher at 1611 GMT, led by former technology shares.

US stocks closed little changed. The Dow Jones Industrial average fell about 0.1 percent and the Nasdaq Composite Index rose by a similar amount.

Gold reached a 25-year peak of $519.40 an ounce after platinum touched a record in Europe on Monday.

Traders said the victory by Islamic militant group Hamas in Palestinian elections and high oil prices, coupled with uncertainty in currency markets, was combining to lift gold's appeal among small and institutional investors.

"Gold's still a safe-haven investment and that's pleasing," one trader said.

U.S. crude oil futures rose 1 cent to $68.42 a barrel ahead of an OPEC meeting later in the day at which the major oil-producing nations are likely to leave output levels unchanged. Reuters

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Eugenio Lopez Foundation Building, Joseph R. Mcallister Campus
123 Paseo de Roxas, Makati City 1229 Philippines

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WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2006 PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Lifestyle Desk Head Yvonne
Deputy Copydesk Head Rose

LIFESTYLE

BACK TO THE '90s *Part 2*

Here's another serving of memories from our good old days.

This week, our pages are packed with the fashion, the iconic moments, the music and the toys that made the '90s the colorful decade that it was.

We also included your own memories—excerpts from the e-mails you sent the INQ7 inbox.

Oh, yes, the '90s rocked. But we know we can make 2006 and the rest of this decade rock even harder!

Top 15 one-hit-wonders of the '90s

By Raul A. Reyes

Remember these oldies that caused major last-song syndrome not too long ago?

OVERPLAYED AND overrated, these songs caused major last-song syndrome until the next pop ditty came along. Let's hope these artists used up the royalties they got from their big hit masterpiece.

11. Backstreet, "Chasing Time." They tried to follow it up with "Round Round" and "I'll Never Change," but it was 1999, and New Kids had become the rage.

14. Deadeye Dick, "Nine Ago Ok." Let us refresh your memory. The one-hit girls came out of Mary Worm, and she was a vegetarian who had a thing for "beans."

15. Montell Jordan, "This Is How We Do It." Montell was the first artist to sign with Def Jam's new Def Soul label. He was also the first artist to have a hit single on the label. Unfortunately, he was also the last artist to have a hit single on the label.

12. Mr. Big, "Addicted to That Rush." That's one debut that quickly faded.

13. Jay Boss, "Whoop There It Is." If "Whoop, there it was."

10. Boyz II Men, "Thank You." Remember when Boyz II Men was a quartet? Remember when Boyz II Men was a group that had more than one hit song? Remember when Boyz II Men was a group that had more than one hit song that wasn't a cover version?

9. Color Me Badd, "I Wanna Sex You Up." Color Me Badd was a group that had more than one hit song that wasn't a cover version. Color Me Badd was a group that had more than one hit song that wasn't a cover version that was also a sex song.

8. Aaron Hall, "Don't Be Afraid." Aaron Hall was a singer who had a hit song that was also a sex song. Aaron Hall was a singer who had a hit song that was also a sex song that was also a cover version.

7. Jade, "Don't Walk Away." Jade was a group that had more than one hit song that wasn't a cover version. Jade was a group that had more than one hit song that wasn't a cover version that was also a sex song.

6. Color Me Badd, "I Wanna Sex You Up." Color Me Badd was a group that had more than one hit song that wasn't a cover version. Color Me Badd was a group that had more than one hit song that wasn't a cover version that was also a sex song.

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3. Backstreet, "Chasing Time." They tried to follow it up with "Round Round" and "I'll Never Change," but it was 1999, and New Kids had become the rage.

2. Mr. Big, "Addicted to That Rush." That's one debut that quickly faded.

1. Jay Boss, "Whoop There It Is." If "Whoop, there it was."

Fashion flashback

Text by Bianca Consard
2bU Correspondent
Photos by DG Alvarez

THE '90S DIDN'T PASS without a few embarrassing moments in fashion. While some fads were fun (like flares, which still refuse to let go), some things were just as bad as shoulder pads—parachute pants, for instance.

Head on to remember the fads of the '90s that you were and loved as well.

The 'Rachel' haircut

The bomb, named after Jennifer Aniston's character in "Friends," was a hit all over the globe. The layered look eventually faded because it required too much maintenance (that, and Jennifer Aniston eventually changed her do.)

Doc Martens

Every kid had to have a pair of Doc Martens. If you didn't, you were not in the correct to attend your next batch of confidante. Doc Martens were worn with everything, from dresses to jeans to overalls, and came in a variety of styles and colors.

Grunge

Blame it on Kurt Cobain and the mind-of-our spite—the early '90s were dominated by with unwashed hair to ripped jeans, flannel shirts and grubby combat boots.

FOR A TIME, guys and girls wore the same thing: baggy jeans and polo shirts.

Statement clothes and accessories

Shirts and necklaces with cutesy-ish words and phrases such as "Whatever," "Yeah, right" and "As if" sold like hotcakes. Also popular at that time were hippie-inspired items, like bows, peace signs, the yin-yang symbol, and flowers.

Baby doll/empire-cut dresses

In the early '90s, girls of all ages wore these cute, babydoll dresses with cutting sleeves or leggings, sometimes paired with either flaky tights or Doc Martens. Double duty: the people who wore them with the latter set are more likely to burn their childhood photos.

Baggy jeans and loose shirts

Baggy jeans and loose polo shirts were a hell that many '90s girls would like to forget. It was hard to distinguish guys from girls as members of both sexes wore the outfits with relative dress and hairdo caps.

Skorts and culottes

Skorts, which looked like skirts in front and shorts in the back, were so popular in cafeteria, which were how (might) some shorts that looked like it, then, they were popular with girls who had to be able to run about and still look feminine at the same time. Not as popular with Pampong Boys.

Butterfly clips

In the late '90s, close rooms or wallows were to be (mostly) gardens as almost half of each grade added high school class were butterfly clips as their hair.

Flared jeans

Flared jeans are '60s corduroys that refuse to die, after years of influencing tapered jeans, flares were welcomed with open arms. There were embroidered flared jeans, embellished flared jeans, and with the birth of large jeans (see below), cargo flares.

WOULD the '90s weren't so bad as the '80s. the clothes weren't exactly something to be proud of, either.

If you'd worn a shirt topped with a spaghetti-strapped dress, then you definitely grew up in the '90s.

Cargo pants

These followed closely on the heels of flared jeans and led to the birth of yes another fashion by-product—the cargo dress. Cargo pants were popular among girls and boys, and up, cutout pockets were found to reveal the contents of an entire house: cell phones, wallets, cigarette lighters, Zippo lighters, house numbers, an entire set of tools...

Loafers

Loafers were pretty popular in the '90s—from fair Equadorian twist-topped penny to chunky black platform-sole style loafers that were paired with short dresses.

Belt bag

Also known as fanny packs, these were worn by both men and women and were slapped around the waist. Very low people risk being seen in public in these nonetheless.

Fishing hats

Popular with high-school boys who didn't know how to fish even if salmon were dangled in their faces, these hats were spun-painted, covered with buttons, and would low over the brows.

Dresses worn over shirts

Was it modesty or a hidden desire to be a man? Neither could be an explanation for why so many girls in the '90s wore dresses over shirts. Plain white tennies (popular with girls during the early '90s (no other color combinations were sprypoint), Doc (such) was worn with frilly and ruffle socks.

Denim dresses and skirts

Denim in the late decade were predominantly long. Long denim skirts with buttons down the front, denim dresses... everything was denim.

Sportswear

Nike left the park in the '90s—thanks to Michael Jordan with his Air Jordan line, basketball jerseys and Jordan's own brand of cologne. Other brands, such as Adidas and its Fear Itty Wear line, didn't even seem close.

Jumpers

Denim overalls, especially denim, were popular with kids and teens. There was even a special "maternity" version of the

2000'S dresses with chunky pants.

one strap had to be casually dropped down one shoulder. Acceptable tops were to which the jumpers included: midriff tops, midriff shirts and baby tees.

Bubble bags

Inflated bags that took up more space than the items they could carry. After a few months of raging success in the teenager, they simply disappeared. Hands bags, Ziploc bags with small chains mounted on them were also big.

Platforms

No thanks to the Spice Girls, platforms were big in the '90s. Their oversized effect, with 4- or 5-inch heels, made adolescents tall and some tramp around and slip every where they went.

Flipped-up hats

Adam Sandy Happy dances and cotton hats—as long as the front part was flipped up in the form (and sometimes pinned with a rainbow or), hats were cool.

Parachute pants

One look at these pants will have MC Hammer's "U Can't Touch This" song playing over and over in your head. While they weren't widely available in the mainstream market, these pants were often seen in underwear of the pre "pop group "U.C" were (hats in a few cameras not talked).

Sunflower clips

These stylized flowers were found on every self-respecting girl's hair (and eventually carried over to

SUNFLOWERS were everywhere on clips, shirts and dresses.

Flashing shoes

Sony lights! Shoes from L.A. Gear? Shoes in 1990-1994 were incomplete without a pair of shoes with lights (and vice versa). Flashing.

Angel's Breath

An Angel's Breath is a generic line—but it sounds it ever has been. Long the early to mid '90s, anyone studied of a Breath or any of its numerous, such as Love.

Baby-G watches

These chunky, bright and wonders shocked wrists of most boys and

Rave clothing/ elephant pants

These were the clothes worn by ravers (not parents) to Elephant pants, which were long and loose enough to hide a pacifier with both ease and those who walked on stilts, elephant pants were flipped bikini pants with tattoo-like designs. Rave clothing simply wore those with

Matte makeup

Glimmer was

Top 10 comics moments of the last de

IF CHANGE IS THE ONLY CONstant in our life, imagine how much truer that theories must hold in the institutions and ruthless world of entertainment.

Sure, spandex and cape-donning men and women have undoubted us for almost 80 years, and they're a cool part of today's pop-culture universe. But they weren't as omnipresent in the '90s. Then, readership was up and down like a rollercoaster ride, and companies were desperate to reach out to the mainstream media.

What followed was a decade full of business events and headline-making ers, but not before many who couldn't keep up dropped out of the hobby altogether.

From comics as 'investments' to comics as entertainment, the '90s were wackier than Wolverine's hair

Image Comics launches

Seven of the industry's best artists turned their backs on Marvel and DC to form the studio Image Comics.

The gamble paid off with titles like "Spawn," "Wild C.A.T.s," and "Witchblade," and image's invasion of the comic-book market was in full swing. Without really trouble the industry, copies like one of the comic shops, however, was the fact that the cases had five different artists, and like Pokemon, one just had to collect them all.

Since then, multiple covers have become a popular seller gimmick, the standouts being Gen 13 #1's 13 covers and Tec Battoon #1's 13 covers. People began buying "rare" variants covers one in mind, but to add to completists fans.

Thankfully, companies learned to listen and scaled back on special cov-

The rise of Vertigo

Tim(s) being strong pod on "hell's there" DC's design line was launched, targeting adults who wanted something a bit more complex than "standard" comic books.

By going with British writers such as Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman and Grant Morrison, Vertigo quickly established itself with titles like "Hellblazer" and "The Sandman," which followed their complex, literate and non-superhero stories.

Many other new ideas were also implemented, such as comic covers without the title characters appearing on them, and comic book readers also would lose the awesome amount of bonus only fans now know that anything with the Vertigo insignia is bound to be edgy and original, like non-superhero comics.

Alex Ross makes his mark

A fully painted comic with photo-realistic art? It was unheard of until a then up-and-comer artist, Ross convinced the powers that be at Marvel to go along with his unbelievable idea.

"Marvels" was a certified hit as many casual readers flocked to Ross' highly detailed art. Its later success led DC and painted backgrounds on various titles with the apocalyptic "Kingdom Come." Without a doubt, Ross is a certified award-winner, thanks to his sweeping and majestic figures. His name alone sells out many books.

Clone Saga

Planted on the seeds of a 1975 story, the Clone Saga centered on a character named Ben Reilly, who was created to be a clone of Spider-Man. Reilly was supposed to be a clone of Spider-Man. Reilly was supposed to be a clone of Spider-Man. Reilly was supposed

SHORTS, tubetops and clogs—definitely '90s trends wear

...gleaming skin was awkward of. Make-up in the early '90s called for intense brown matte lipstick, visible lip liner, and pale faces. Ginger replaced the matte makeup look in the latter part of the decade with the claim of the near-fashionistas.

Birkenstocks with socks

Aside to urbanites—Birks had to be worn with socks. Whether you wear jeans or shorts, Birks were cool in the mid-to-late '90s. Although some people overlooked their ugly colors with their socks, most wore plain white socks with their leather Birks.

Branded everything

Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger—name and shirts defined our first names. The "cool" people carried around branded paper bags to show off their labels. The elephant in the room in Canada led to the rampant proliferation of fake designer goods.

E-mail the author at lifestyle@philstar.com

Last boy band standing

By Tammy David
INQ7 Correspondent

BACKSTREET Boys a decade later (from L, AJ, Nick, Kevin and Brian

The Backstreet Boys finally oblige their fans with a concert that has the teen crowd wishing the Boys will forever be boys

BEFORE WESTLIFE WON AND LAZIE herself fans with their versatility, before homeboy import Fit charmed and charged Filipino fans 10k for front-row tickets, before flat quarters Gale fled inside pop-savvy laugh-out-loud with their shiny corps... there were the Backstreet Boys.

Thanks to Howie, Kevin, AJ, Brian and Nick, owner to the '90s will be remembered not only for the hard-hanging fellas from Seattle (Melinda, who else). Nor also for the name singing and donning by the penny boys who dominated the scene during the latter part of the decade.

It was the Backstreet Boys, or BSB to fans, who pioneered the era of manufactured boy bands and pop acts.

And since the boys really made it a point to act their hand-spot by teaming it was "all about the music," they would sometimes perform acapella just to prove they had the voice to back up their looks and marketability. Their others paid off since, it seems, they are the last boys standing (read: Complete five-original members).

Flashback. The boys came to Manila for the first time in October 1996. This was the...

...the fifty-faced Nick Carter had long hair (and a mole). The boys were marching marvelous and their fans, wildly unleashed in the popular title, Insatiable.

The boys were also relatively unknown in the United States, their homeland, but were already certified superstars in other parts of the globe, the Philippines included.

They performed in Ultra Dena, and I still remember that day vividly. I waited to desperately to get their autograph. My chest got scratched after a minor scuffle, and I knew I'd enough promised me they'll be back soon.

I was expecting a concert the following year, ten of years; we all know what happened to them afterwards.

Superstardom

They finally hit it big in the US two years after they had made a mark in other continents. They topped the Billboard charts, sold millions of albums, got numerous awards and Grammy nods, drank with lawmaks and even sat with a greatest hits album in 2000.

Some members got tracked. Nick Carter released a solo album. The group also drank with bad press, such as AJ McLean's alcohol and ecstasy addictions.

But like many bond line in, like who up to now and segue with N'Sync fans, sympathized with AJ McLean when he entered rehab, and heard a certain band haircut for remaining Nick Carter, I was still wishing to see them perform live for the second time.

Comeback

But the boys have made a comeback. After five years since their last studio album, the Backstreet Boys released "Never Gone" last June and unsurprisingly worldwide.

In last Jan. 29, fans packed the Araneta Center, they ranged from those who had known and body fat to the elder set (many of them still fat and overweight), all pining for their favorite Backstreet Boy.

Though the show was far from the usual tell-boys-dollar production the characterized the band during their "millennium" was the energy inside the coliseum was high.

The fans didn't seem to care the boys were dressed like their brothers, which is a far cry from the tailored suits and silk shirts they had worn during their peak.

The boys performed a total of 23 songs, and the audience sang along to numerous hits such as "All I Have To Give" and the songs from the group's latest album, "I Still."

Nick introduced his "girl," which turned out to be a guitar, and played "Climbing the Walls." To gain a more rock style with "Don Want You to Know." Kevin Richardson played the piano when he serenaded the set with "Never Gone," which he had written in memory of his father. The reunion, "Backstreet's Back," found the band's reunion incoherent.

Backstreet in the future

At a press conference, the boys mentioned their plans, which were mostly personal. They talked about solo albums, a gospel album, reuniting two acting, developing artists with their respective production companies. Still others talked about establishing a hijau foundation and rediscovering fatherhood.

As much as fans wished down the line, many were worried it might take another five years to release a studio album or worse, "Never Gone" might be their last.

But personally, passion the drama, the Backstreet Boys have already made their mark in pop culture—marching the business, touching lives and growing up with their fans. We just have to wait and see.

So being a fan, yes, I'm hoping for a follow-up to "Never Gone" and another concert soon; it's going to be 20 years from now.

"Backstreet's back, alright!"

E-mail tammydavid@gmail.com.

Do you have an extraordinary love story?

IS IT A STUDIO OF HOT AND CHEESY? WHOSE them character and villains and action sound? Is it movie-worthy? Will you make people swoon and wish for their own romantic tale? Are you and your beloved still together?

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Write your story, share it, film it, even sing it—it's totally up to you. Be as creative as you can.

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Our chosen couples will win spectacular Valentine packages from 24x7!

ecade

While the TV show toward on the season after that happened, the movie added an interesting wrinkle to the premise's comic book premise and be revolutionary movie-series to come.

Electro-blue Superman

People in DC must see for Kilolliel with the adage "If a site's broke, don't fix it."

Attempting to shake up the status quo once again, writers refined the premise once a being of energy, losing him to rely on an energy-consciousness out. So if that wasn't enough, Superman had to deal with cyber issues as well in the form of a "red" Superman.

Universal horror of the genesis, however, eventually made Superman go back to his classic suit, a move generated much cheering.

Marvel Knights launches

With Marvel cowering on the brink of bankruptcy it took an unusual cadre of superheroes to save the day.

Several cut characters such as Daredevil, the Inhumans, and the Punisher were revived by some of the best writers in the business, including film director Kevin Smith ("Clerks," "Jersey Girl"), and color spiked.

Marvel my know was so impressed that they promoted him editor in chief. The company emerged from bankruptcy soon after, and is a success for his 3 comics publishers.

...emember their ...ts and misses

...Britain ...Silmar, Cagayan de Oro

...Emery Ahmad's proactive was my favorite. After reading your account, I found myself wishing I could go back in time to when I was just a kid and the only thing bothering me was if the thin inner wrapper around Pilico bubble candy was edible.

...Aurora

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

LIFESTYLE

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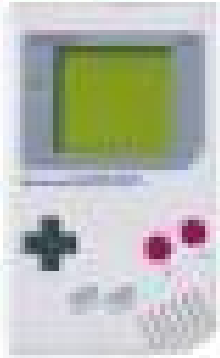
Toys for girls and boys



Remember the playthings of yesteryear —and laugh

by Angela V. Ignacio
INQ7 Correspondent

NO OF TOO LONG AGO, WHEN IPODS were still figments of Steve Jobs' imagination, we kids were blissfully discovering the joys of wee bit portable electronics and vinyl toys. Head on and rediscover your childhood with the popular playthings of our generation.

Brick Games. For '90s kids, Brick Game (or Tetris) was THE electronic game of their childhood.

SNES. Short for Super Nintendo Entertainment System, SNES was arguably the hottest console in the '90s.

Game Boy. Nintendo's "baby" paved the way for modern portable games.

Gimmicky Gizmos. These clay toys were made of jelly-like material that grew in size when submerged in lukewarm water and returned to their original size when dry. Kinder kids used to "harvest" a number of these in basin-ruby, to have more" during.

Grasshoppers. Fun, quirky and well within the P50 budget. Grasshoppers only needed a little water and some sun for their "hops" to grow, although I could never make mine grow to hop-pass-the-entertainment-before-it-shrivel size.

Rare Walks. Either you love 'em or you hate 'em. Who would've thought these pre-bottled, bug-eyed creatures would turn out to be someone's best friend? They become such a huge hit in the '90s that they were spawned a dizzying variety of collectibles: Rainbow Fishs, Treasure Trolls, Mary Kate and Ashley... I hope kidding.

Polly Pocket. Many girls loved these clay plastic dolls that came with pastel houses roughly the size of an adult's makeup compact case.

Beads Balls. Resembling miniature gumballs, these were strings rubber balls in various color combinations that you could use around and, oh, was around.

Sticky. Long rectangle suddenly became popular creature space for kids who wanted to see where Sticky can climb down the most steps.

Tickle Me Elmo. Whether for baby showers or hyper girls, the tickle-talking furry red monster from Sesame Street was everyone's favorite must-have plaything.

Furby dolls. It talks, moves and communicates with others of its kind.

Pokemons. Short for Pocket Monsters. Their popularity skyrocketed faster than you can say "Pikachu!"

Magic Eye. Magic Eye books were the probably the most common cause of eyestrain related to the '90s. I could've stared at a picture forever and still not see anything past the blinding patterns, and let's face it, neither could you!

E-mail the author at angela_ignacio@yahoo.com

POSTNOT

BY BILL AMEND

A LITPIX

BY JOSS ABRERA

PEANUTS

BY TOM ARMSTRONG

PUGAD BABOY

BY PIC JUNIOR

BABY BLUES

BY JERRY SCOTT

HUTTS

BY PATRICK MCDONNELL

ATOMO AND WEBOY

BY LYRA GARCELLANO

DIVINE COMEDY

BY STEVEN PANALIGAN

HOROSCOPE

BY FRANCES DRAKE

THIS IS HOW TODAY You're clever and mentally quick. You have a fine mind. You know how to communicate your ideas/opinions, and you do so in more or less the right way. Mental pursuits enthrall you, and have sufficed since you were young. You can likewise visit well. The next ahead will focus on professional and even closer relationships.

Birthdays of: Lisa Kudrow (movie singer), Langston Hughes, writer; Clark Gable, actor.

ARIES (March 21 to April 19) You feel very much like showing off your talents more than usual today. There's some-thing quite essential you want to achieve. It's something deep in your heart, and would involve influence a group.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20) You might appreciate a partner, boss or authority figure working on behalf of someone else today, especially on work. You want to help the underdog.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20) Someone may be trying to get you to do something you don't want to do today. However, we all have to do things we don't like to have something to eat for.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22) You're willing to put the needs of others before your own. You feel quite selfless today when you consider the contributing emotions that others are doing.

LEO (July 23 to Aug. 22) You're confident and in control of your relationships. Can-cers like you were probably summer and you shine in two-color-ful glasses.

VIRGO (Aug. 23 to Sept. 22) Your ability to use your imagination and to see things in a good perspective-setting encourages at work today. Don't be afraid to think outside the box.

LIBRA (Sept. 23 to Oct. 22) You excel at negotiation today. Using your imagination in combination with your intuitive sense, you can help others see the benefits of change.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23 to Nov. 21) You can be rather defensive sometimes, or overreactive to criticism. Today is one of those days. You don't OK, but do not be defensive in order to get around anything. Just stay looking.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22 to Dec. 21) You could help yourself today by listening to others. You need listening off to people who have something to say, even if you don't like what they say.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 to Jan. 19) Be careful with your words today. Those could be some confusion. You might not get the answer you want, but you might have several, someone could be dishonest with you, so you might be wise to exercise caution.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20 to Feb. 18) This is not a good day for you to make important decisions. Emotions and illusions can blind us to your sign. This is like having hazelnut on your head. Things look wonderful, but are they?

PISCES (Feb. 19 to March 20) It's easy to get yourself noisy. You might be feeling a bit confused or unsure today. You might think things are better than they are. Don't be afraid to find out.

BEH

BY DANIEL SHELTON

KIKO MACHINE

BY MANG ABRERA

LOKENOTS

BY ELIZABETH CHONGLO

TALDOK

BY RAFLAMAD SETUH HILAMBILING

DAILY CROSSWORD

Win Nike goodies!

IF YOU'RE A BIG NIKE FAN, ZEE AND NIKE are giving you the chance to win some awesome prizes.

Just give us the answer to this question: Which Air Max model was the first to have a fully-visible heel Air unit?

Hint: The answer can be found in the article we read carefully.

E-mail your answers to contzee@inquirer.com.ph.

The first person to send the correct answer will receive P5,000 worth of Nike goodies from Nike Park. Ten other lucky Zeeks readers will receive a Nike shirt and a Commemorative Book of the History of Air Max.

Deadline for entries is Feb. 3.

Win this shirt and this book as your bonus. P5,000 worth of Nike products.

By Dexter R. Matilla

WHEN NIKE LAID BOTH TO THE Nike Air and Air Max technology 25 years ago, the innovations were considered a revolution. Never before had there been any other technology dedicated to comfort and performance in an athletic shoe.

Add four of the Air Max shoe consider models from 1987, 1990, 1993 (have heel fully-visible heel Air unit), 1995 (first to have visible forefoot air), 1997, 2006, and 2003 as collectibles.

The year 2006 can likewise be considered another revolutionary year with the introduction of the Air Max 360. With a cushioning system that features 360 degrees of Max Air cushioning, the AM360 is probably the closest one can ever get to experiencing total and extensive comfort whether walking or running.

"The launch of Nike Air Max 360 marks the next evolution of Air, reinforcing our leadership in technology and innovation," said Nike Philippines marketing manager Deedee Ruiz. "Catering to the everyday athlete, Air Max serves to provide premium cushioning for the active, providing comfort and performance at every level. Nike Philippines is proud to be part of the global launch and in offering loyal consumers an opportunity to test on air."

Withstanding wear and tear

Having a foamless midsole dramatically reduces weight and increases durability. Foam midsoles generally last for about 300 to 500 miles before their shock-absorbing properties deteriorate. But since the AM360 has been engineered to withstand the wear and tear that befall most running shoes, the cushioning will feel the same—from the moment you take the shoe out of the box and wear it for the first time—even after extensive usage.

According to Martin Lorit, Global Footwear Designer of the AM360, "Air Max 360 is all about air ... and air is all about cushioning. That's truly the heritage of Nike—bringing innovation and superior cushioning technology to the consumer. That was certainly the goal for the Air Max 360."

Martin was able to frame the newly-engineered full-length Max Air unit and other new air from by utilizing the heel, a common design element identified from the Air Max lineage.

He believes in the "less is more" ideal, creating a visual hierarchy that lets the Max Air unit stand out. Though it seems simple from a distance, the AM360 has intriguing details...from the laser edging to the Nike Air emblem on the shoe's rock finer—that are certainly a feast for the eyes.

A complete reflectivity upper makes for maximum exposure in low light conditions while deep flex grooves and beveled heel enhance natural motion characteristics. Add to that the fact that the Max Air unit in the AM360 is tuned specifically for gender and shoe size that ensure added precision in impact protection.

Taking it a step further, the AM360's dynamic fit inner sleeve provides a soft, seamless interior that helps eliminate abrasion while the outer synthetic leather panels provide structure and support. The laser-cuts in the upper provide breathable comfort without the weight issue. Having said that, the AM360 is the lightest full Air Max shoe to date at 13 oz or 368.5 g.

And if that's not enough, just keep in mind that 360 degrees is equal to one revolution, which the AM360 truly encompasses. Indeed, the revolution for the Air Max technology has come full circle as it is the first shoe that gives you the sensation of running (or walking) on air.

AM Max 360 for women

FASHION and accessories by Kate Torralba

ACCESSORIES by Penny de Leon Gonzalez

TEENS Prince Rabbit (above) and Dita Sandico Ong's signature creations, such as her Bota Slippers, await shoppers at the HSBC Charity Market (right)

ACCESSORIES by Happy David and Color Theory

Shop for a cause

HOME by De Leon Gonzalez

By Pam Padua

YOU KNOW OUR MOTTO—RETAIL therapy goes a long way. The Fashion Pirates consider shopping as one of life's most delicious pleasures.

And that pleasure becomes even greater when we know that we are stretching our purchasing power for a bigger cause.

On Feb. 4, HSBC turns shopping into a double pleasure by holding Red Letter Day, which raises funds for Children's Hour.

Along with other generous personalities and companies, HSBC has planned a full day at the Manila Polo Club that includes a Charity Challenge Tournament led by HSBC's CEO Pioneer Manning. (Pledge cards for the activities can be downloaded from www.hsbc.com.ph and can be faxed to 7559662.)

There are also activities for the whole family: magic shows and lily Tan watercolor demos, pottery for kids, a cooking demo, a cake decorating session and even a Charity Jam where artists will pledge songs at their contribution to Children's Hour.

Personalities will design shirts for auction at the event.

FASHION by Paige Quimson

A donation of P100, which will earn you a pass to the Charity Fair and Charity Jam, will also entitle you to join the beauty raffle. (Manila Polo Club members, Premier card holders and HSBC customers can enter for free. Just present your ID, your Premier card or HSBC credit card.)

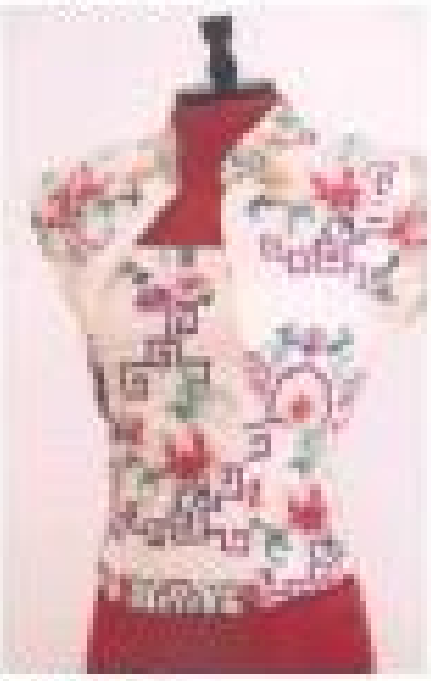
Yes, that's our favorite part, the Charity Fair.

Visit the Cyprus Village from 10 a.m.-6 p.m. and check out great finds from some of The Fashion Pirates' favorite designers and young entrepreneurs. Stock up on goods from Happy David and Color Theory, Kate Torralba, Tin Clarin, Patty Quimson, Irene Pedro Roldan, Ria Fernandez Prieto, Rica Bernardo, Dita Sandico Ong, Jam Delgado, Patty Enriquez, Astrid Ocampo, Twinkle de Leon-Gonzalez and many others.

And because we're pretty sure you want to get started on your shopping list, here's a preview of what you can buy at the Charity Fair.

Donors can choose which Children's Hour charity to donate to: Stepping Stones Learning for Special Children, Sa Aklat Sikat, Central Palawan, GMA7, Bread n' Butter or Salesians of MCC.

Oh yes, there's nothing like shopping for a cause.



FASHION by Torralba